

Albright holds off on Mideast trip

WASHINGTON (AFP) — U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright will not meet with Israeli Foreign Minister Ariel Sharon and has no plans to travel to the Middle East as previously planned, the State Department said Monday. Sharon will meet in New York Friday with Middle East coordinator Dennis Ross but the State Department denied the lower-level U.S. representation was a snub intended to highlight U.S. frustration with Israel's decision to freeze the Wye River peace deal. "The suggestion that there's some problem between us and the Israeli foreign ministry is simply incorrect," said State Department spokesman James Rubin. He said Sharon had offered to meet with either Ross or Albright to discuss the Mideast peace process. Albright had been scheduled to travel to Israel this month to take stock of progress in implementing the Wye River land-for-security deal.

Jordan Times

An independent Arab political daily published by the Jordan Press Foundation
جوردان تايمز يومية سياسية مستقلة تصدر بالانجليزية عن المؤسسة الصحفية الأردنية للبراق

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Hizbollah Katyushas slam border area

MARIYOUN (AFP) — The Lebanese occupation resistance group Hizbollah Monday fired three Katyusha rockets at an Israeli position near the Lebanese-Israeli international border, security sources said. The Katyushas, which caused no casualties, fell near two Israeli tanks driving out of the border post of Qabaa, which overlooks the village of Houla in the Israeli-occupied buffer zone of southern Lebanon, they said. The Islamic Resistance, Hizbollah's military wing, claimed the attack.

Peace fund finds \$60m for Palestinians

TEL AVIV (Reuters) — A fund conceived by former Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres and the head of the World Bank has raised \$60 million for investment in Palestinian businesses in the West Bank and Gaza, Peres said on Monday. The Peace Technology Fund, which will make its first investments in 1999, seeks to support the growth of the Palestinian private sector and joint ventures with Israeli and international businesses.

Assad due to be reelected next month

BEIRUT (AFP) — Syrian President Hafez Al Assad is expected to be reelected president for a fourth term since 1970 in a popular referendum to be held next month, the Lebanese newspaper Al Nahar reported Monday. "A referendum for the reelection of Assad will most probably take place Feb. 8 after a commission presided by Vice President Abdul Halim Khaddam takes the necessary measures," the newspaper said. "A popular [electoral] campaign will precede the referendum," the daily added. Assad, 69, has been in power since 1970 and has completed four seven-year terms.

U.S. embassy in Syria reopens

DAMASCUS (R) — The American embassy in Damascus on Monday announced a partial resumption of consular services 16 days after being damaged by demonstrators protesting against the U.S.-led air strikes on Iraq. The embassy said in a statement that the mission would resume some consular services and other services on Tuesday but that visas for visitors, students and businesspeople would not be issued until further notice.

Yemen will not join Commonwealth

SANAA (R) — Yemen said on Monday it was abandoning a bid to join the Commonwealth group of nations following a diplomatic row with Britain over the killing of four Western hostages in the Arabian state. A Yemeni foreign ministry statement said comments attributed to a British government official that Yemen's bid to join the Commonwealth would not succeed "stem from lack of keenness for clear relations between the two governments."

UAE's population grows to 2.776 m

ABU DHABI (R) — The population of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) swelled to some 2.776 million in 1998 compared to 2.624 million the previous year, figures released by the planning ministry on Monday showed. The proportion of the population in work also rose in the same period, with the workforce growing to 1.378 million in 1998 against 1.330 million in 1997.

Two Israeli women injured in Hebron attack

HEBRON (AFP) — Two Israeli women were wounded Monday when Palestinian militants riddled their vehicle with automatic rifle fire in the divided city of Hebron — the first political violence in the West Bank of the year. One of the women was hospitalized with serious wounds and the other was in moderate condition, police said. A third woman was slightly cut by shattered glass.

All three women were from the Jewish settlement of Kiryat Arba, located outside Hebron. Their GMC utility vehicle was hit by at least 21 bullets in the attack near Al Ibrahim mosque, a shrine sacred to both Muslims and Jews in an Israeli-controlled sector of Hebron.

Israel Radio said the gunmen apparently fired from the roof of a building in the Palestinian-ruled part of the city of 140,000 and Israeli leaders called on the Palestinian

National Authority (PNA) to hunt down the attackers. The Israeli army imposed a curfew on Palestinian residents living in the Israeli-controlled zone of Hebron and sealed all entrances to the Palestinian-run part of the city. Some Palestinian youths responded to the Israeli clampdown by throwing stones at soldiers guarding the Jewish enclave. Two people were wounded by Israeli troops firing rubber-coated metal bullets, witnesses said.

Police identified the gunshot victims as Fanny Alazra, 54, who had serious wounds to the chest and neck, and Florie Hoff, 45, who was moderately hurt. They were hospitalized in Jerusalem.

Four-fifths of Hebron has been under Palestinian control since January 1997, but about 400 militant Jewish settlers live in an enclave in the remaining fifth of the city.

(Continued on page 12)



An Israeli plain-clothed security officer questions a Palestinian boy in the West Bank town of Hebron after suspected Palestinian militants fired on a van carrying Israeli settlers as it passed through the divided city injuring two women passengers on Monday (AP photo)

Israel officially heads into long election campaign

TEL AVIV (AFP) — Israel's parliament voted overwhelmingly Monday to hold early national elections on May 17, formally launching what is expected to be a long and bruising electoral campaign likely to leave the beleaguered peace process in limbo. In successive second and third readings of the early-elections bill, deputies voted 85 to 27 to dissolve the legislature and move the polls up from their scheduled date in the year 2000 to May 17.

Under Israeli election rules, two votes will be held in parallel — an election by proportional representation for the 120-member parliament, or Knesset, and a straight majority vote for the prime minister. If no candidate for prime

minister gains 50 per cent of the vote on May 17, as appears likely, a second-round run-off between the two leading contenders will be held on June 1.

The bill was supported by virtually all members of the opposition as well as a large number of deputies from Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's badly splintered seven-party coalition. Deputies said Netanyahu fought until the last minute to hold off the early polls, even trying to offer the vacant finance minister's portfolio to former foreign minister David Levy in a failed replay of an earlier bid to win the backing of Levy's few supporters in the Knesset.

(Continued on page 12)

U.S.: Iraqi aircraft probe no-fly zones

Agencies

IRAQI AIRCRAFT probed the edges of the U.S.-enforced no-fly zones over Iraq during the past several days without drawing retaliatory attacks by U.S. warplanes, a Pentagon official said Monday. The incursions were the latest in a series of Iraqi challenges to the no-fly zones in the wake of last month's four-day "Desert Fox" air campaign by U.S. and British forces.

"There have been instances in the past several days of Iraqi aircraft attempting to fly on the edge of the no-fly zone and even entering the no-fly zone for brief periods," said the Pentagon official, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

The official declined to say when or where Iraqi aircraft crossed into the no-fly zones.

"We don't comment on each aircraft for operational reasons," he said. However, he said the incursions did not draw any attacks by U.S. warplanes patrolling the zones. "We do maintain robust rules of engagement that allow us to defend ourselves and enforce the no-fly zone," he said.

The White House said Monday the United States would continue to enforce the no-fly zones. "The president has made clear that he plans to enforce the no-fly zones," White House spokesman Joe Lockhart said. "It is an important part of our containment policy limiting his [Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's] ability to threaten his neighbors and repress his own people," Lockhart added.

(Continued on page 12)

Kuwaiti deputy premier arrives today on ground-breaking visit

By Caroline Faraj

AMMAN — A Kuwaiti minister is due in Amman on Tuesday for a ground-breaking visit expected to help bury a legacy of strained ties that resulted from the 1990-91 Gulf crisis, officials said.

The visit of Kuwait's deputy prime minister and minister of state for cabinet affairs, Abdul Aziz Al Dakhil, comes two days after Kuwait sent an invitation to Foreign Minister Abdul Ilah Al Khatib to visit the emirate.

Dakhil is expected to deliver a message to His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hassan on bilateral ties and regional developments, the Jordanian officials added.

Khatib told the Jordan Times on Monday he had accepted the invitation to go to Kuwait. However, he said, no date has been set yet.

"I have sent a reply message to Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al Ahmad Al Sabah on

Sunday expressing appreciation for his noble feelings and congratulating on the recovery of His Majesty King Hussein, and also thanked him for the invitation to visit Kuwait, which I hope to make soon," Khatib added.

Informed sources told the Jordan Times that Kuwait sent two official messages to Jordan within one week.

"Jordan received two warm messages from Kuwait during the last week," one source said. "The first message came after Prince Hassan's call in the opening address before the emergency session of the Arab Parliamentary Union that was held in Amman on Dec. 27, for the release of the Kuwaiti prisoners of war [PoWs] held in Iraq."

"A few days later, Sheikh Sabah sent another message to his Jordanian counterpart inviting him to visit Kuwait and also offering congratulations on the King's full recovery, wishing him a safe return

home," he added. A senior official described the Kuwaiti invitation as crowing an end to the eight-year strain in ties between the two countries.

"We hope our contacts will further boost ties and return them to pre-crisis levels of warmth," a senior official said. Arab diplomats said they expected Dakhil to extend his government's appreciation for Amman's stance during the four-day campaign of U.S.-led air strikes on Iraq last month. The trip will be the first by a top-level Kuwaiti minister since the Gulf crisis soured bilateral ties because of Amman's perceived tilt towards Iraq, which occupied Kuwait for seven months in August 1990.

Jordan condemned the invasion, but, unlike other Arab countries, it refused to join the U.S.-led military alliance that later liberated Kuwait.

(Continued on page 12)

Prospects for holding Arab summit slim, official says

By Caroline Faraj

AMMAN — The prospects of holding an Arab summit to discuss the U.S.-led air strikes against Iraq the Iraqi situation are slim, a senior official said yesterday.

"It might be possible to hold an Arab ministerial meeting on Jan. 24 to discuss the U.S.-led air strikes against Iraq over arms inspections," the official who did not wish to be named, told the Jordan Times. "But differences may prevent the ministers from reaching a decision on the holding of an Arab summit," he added.

Arab foreign ministers are due to meet at the Arab League headquarters in Cairo on Jan. 24 upon Yemen's request.

The meeting was postponed from Dec. 30 after a secret visit by Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud Al Faisal to Cairo last week, officials said.

Reuters on Sunday quoted a senior Gulf official as saying that even the Jan. 24

meeting might be delayed due to "sharp differences among Arab leaders."

But Arab League Secretary General Esmaat Abdel Meguid confirmed that the meeting will take place on the planned date.

"The January 24 meeting is still on and there is no intention to delay or postpone it. Kuwait [Sunday] confirmed its attendance," Abdul Meguid told reporters Sunday in Cairo. Jordan also said it would attend any meeting to discuss Arab affairs.

"Jordan always supports calls for holding an Arab meeting for the benefit of the Arab World," Information Minister Nasser Judeh said last week. "But we believe an Arab summit needs a clear agenda in order to guarantee that it would achieve its aspired goals and objectives."

The foreign ministers of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Oman and Syria met in the Egyptian Red Sea resort of Hurgada on Saturday to discuss the ministerial meeting.

Egyptian Foreign Minister Anwar Musa said the talks were aimed at "coming up with a general agreement on what the foreign ministers meeting can produce."

Another meeting between Jordanian, Egyptian and Palestinian officials is also expected soon to coordinate positions.

"As part of our ongoing coordination and consultations, three ministers from the three countries are expected to meet after Eid Al Fitr," a senior official said.

"The meeting is vital to clarify in advance what we are going to achieve in the summit," he added.

If the Arab League ministers agree on holding the summit, it will be the first since the Arab leaders met in Cairo in 1996 to discuss the peace process.

Iraq has attacked Abdul Meguid, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and other Arab leaders, accusing them of postponing the ministers meeting to contain Arab anger against the air strikes.

Commission bows to Bank of England on euro terminology

BRUSSELS (AFP) — Its official: whenever more than one Euro are gathered together they shall be known as "euros" — and it all thanks to the Bank of England. The European Commission confirmed on Monday that it had decided to ignore the official documents authorising the launch of the new currency, in which the English plural of one euro is written without any 's' at the end. All press releases and official documents from the EU executive will refer to one euro, but two, ten or one hundred euros, chief spokeswoman Martine Richaumont confirmed. "In the official text adopted by the council of ministers, there is no s, but we saw that the Bank of England had adopted this usage so we decided to follow," she said. The plural of euro is either written or pronounced with an s in 10 of the 11 official EU languages, the exception being German, which keeps the word the same for both the singular and the plural. Appropriately — some might say — for a currency that has been created largely on Germany's terms, it is the German usage that will be reflected on the standardised euro notes when they are introduced in 2002.

as we keep our fundamentals strong. I think the dollar (and) U.S. borrowing costs will do just fine."

The 11 nations that adopted the euro have about the same economic output and share of world trade as the United States.

That weight has prompted some analysts to speculate

whether investors and central banks may switch their holdings from the dollar into the euro.

That would make it harder for the United States to attract capital that it needs to finance its ballooning trade deficit, push up U.S. interest rates and put a damper on growth.



A man on stilts in euro colours lifts the beret of a passer-by in the '24 hours of the euro' parade on Monday in Paris to celebrate the birth of Europe's common currency (AFP photo)

Cult member protests innocence; Israel issues deportation orders

PETAH TIKVAH (AP) — Hunched over on a bench in an Israeli magistrate's court Monday, a member of the Denver-based doomsday cult said he never planned to harm anyone.

However, Israeli police believe the suspect and others in the Concerned Christians group hatched a plot to commit acts of violence near Jerusalem holy sites in hopes of triggering a bloody Armageddon that would bring about the return of Christ.

"I am not here to hurt anybody," the suspect, identified in court documents as John Bayles, said in a soft voice.

Bayles, of Denver, and two other men — identified by their lawyer as Terry Smith, 42, of Eagle, Colorado, and Eric Malesic, 36, of Westminster, a Denver suburb — appeared before the court Monday.

All three denied the allegations and were ordered held another 48 hours until police complete their investigation.

Another 11 people alleged to belong to the cult — including six children — were ordered deported and have three days to appeal.

Israeli Interior Minister Eli Suissa suggested that the suspects had planned to commit suicide and not intended to harm anyone else.

"We don't want such people here, not that we are against tourists coming. But they shouldn't do things we don't want them to do," Suissa said on Israel army radio.

The 14 were detained Sunday in raids on two homes in the Jerusalem suburbs of Moza and Mevaseret Zion.

Officials said the three men in detention would be ordered deported pending completion

of an investigation into suspicions that they planned to harm holy places in Israel.

"That is totally denied," Smith, wearing a green windbreaker and Reeboks stripped of their laces, said when told of the police suspicions.

When Judge Nira Diskin asked Malesic if he would accept public defender Eran Avital as his lawyer, the bearded American calmly eyed Avital for a moment, then pronounced: "That's fine."

Avital, who is representing all three men, said he believed the charges would be dismissed by the next court appearance in 48 hours, although he did not see much of the evidence.

"It's all classified," he said.

Israeli officials fear that the Concerned Christians may only be a forerunner and that scores of other religious extremists will be drawn to pre-millennial Jerusalem to live out apocalyptic fantasies, including mass suicide.

Some 4.5 million tourists, including many Christian pilgrims, are expected to visit the Holy Land this year, double the usual number.

The Denver cultists were arrested by a newly formed Israeli task force consisting of police, agents of the domestic Shin Bet security service and the Mossad spy agency.

Members of the Concerned Christians, a cult which counts only several dozen members, began selling their homes in and around Denver this fall.

Their leader, Monte Kim Miller, believes he will die on the streets of Jerusalem in December and be resurrected. Miller was not among those detained, and police said he was not in Israel.



Holding a coat over his head, John Bayles of Denver, a member of the Denver-based doomsday cult The Concerned Christians, is led by Israeli police detectives to a hearing at Petah Tikvah's magistrates court Monday. Israel on Monday ordered 11 members of the cult deported and brought two others before a magistrate on suspicion that they plotted a Jerusalem shootout with police in hopes it would bring Jesus Christ's return (AP photo)

The 14 cult members arrived in Israel in small groups in September and settled in two spacious suburban homes in Moza and Mevaseret. They were under police surveillance for several weeks.

Israeli police have said the cult members planned to provoke bloodshed by attacking policemen on the streets of Jerusalem, a city with sites sacred to Judaism and Islam. Members of the group believe that this act would hasten the Second Coming.

Denver policeman Mark

Roggenman, who has been following the case on his own time, recognised another of the alleged cult members arrested in the suburb of Moza from a newspaper photo.

He identified a woman holding a baby as she gets into a police vehicle as Annie Biondo Malesic and told The Associated Press that her mother had identified her as well. Her relationship to Eric Malesic was not clear.

A licence plate on a Yamaha off-road motorcycle left on the lawn in front of the house in

Moza was registered to Gary and Cheryl Schmidt of Yellowjacket, about 400 kilometres Southwest of Denver.

Neighbours, who knew the couple who lived in the house as Gary and Cheryl, said they had disappeared about a month ago.

First Sgt. Ilan Granot told the court there was concern Bayles might harm himself and that he was being watched closely.

"I don't feel I pose a threat to anybody," Bayles said.

Ecevit revives bid to lead Turkey's next government

ANKARA (AP) — A Turkish leftist leader appeared ready Monday to revive his bid to form a secular coalition government after a surprise declaration of support from former Premier Tansu Ciller.

In an abrupt about-face, Ciller said Monday her centre-right True Path party would now back a government led by Bulent Ecevit, a coalition she had previously rejected.

Ciller said she would not support premier-designate Yalim Erez, an independent lawmaker who picked up efforts to form a government after Ecevit's own attempt to do so failed.

Acting Premier Mesut Yilmaz, whose government fell in a mafia scandal in November, said his centre-right party would also back Ecevit's Democratic Left Party.

"For the first time, there seems to be a consensus that could win a vote of confidence," Yilmaz said.

Whatever government

finally emerges will be Turkey's sixth since 1995. Squabbles between centre-left and centre-right parties and disagreements over whether to allow Islamic leaders a role in any new government have slowed the coalition-building.

Ecevit had tried for three weeks to form a coalition that shut out the Islamic Virtue Party, the largest party in parliament, but his bid failed when he was unable to bring Ciller on board.

Now, with Yilmaz's and Ciller's support, Ecevit could command a majority in the 550-seat parliament.

Erez, a defector from Ciller's party, had wooed the conditional support of Yilmaz and Ecevit. If he loses it, Erez would have to give up on forming a government.

Erez had hoped to submit a proposed cabinet to President Suleyman Demirel this week.

Meanwhile, Turkey's

influential military warned Islamic sympathisers Monday against trying to exploit the nation's government crisis.

The warning came in an statement denouncing recent claims in Islamic newspapers and broadcasts that some in the military sympathised with the Islamic movement. "Attempts to divide the armed forces by presenting some officers as being favourable are being observed with sorrow at a time when stability is required for the urgent formation of a government," the General Staff said.

"The Turkish armed forces are maintaining their struggle against those who want to form a state based on Islamic laws."

Although an overwhelmingly Muslim nation, Turkey's constitution mandates a strictly secular government. The military pressured the republic's first Islamic-oriented government out of power last year.

NEWS IN BRIEF

28 killed in Somalia

MOGADISHU (AFP) — At least 28 people were killed and 10 others wounded when an anti-tank rocket was fired at a bus near the southern Somali town of Baidoa, the newspaper Xogogal reported Monday. The paper said that the bus was transporting civilians from Baidoa to Mogadishu at the time of the attack, which it said was carried out by the Rahanwein Resistance Army (RRA). The wounded, and those who died were taken back to the main hospital in Baidoa, a nurse at the hospital said. Two of the wounded died in Baidoa overnight while three others remained in a critical condition.

Iran to hold public funeral for 440 soldiers from the Iraqi war

TEHRAN (AFP) — Iran will hold public funeral ceremonies in Tehran on Friday for 440 of its soldiers who died in the 1980-88 war against Iraq, though 119 of them have not been identified, a military official announced Monday. "The funeral procession will take place at the end of Friday prayers in front of Tehran University," said General Mir Feisal Bagerzadeh, in charge of search operations for the bodies of Iranian soldiers. He was quoted by Iranian radio as saying that the remains of some 10 to 12,000 Iranians "are still in Iraq." The two countries regularly exchange the bodies of former combatants, and more than 40,000 corpses have been found since the end of the war that claimed some 300,000 Iranian lives.

Iraqi opposition chief in Kuwait

DUBAI (AFP) — An Iraqi opposition group said its chief met Kuwait's emir on Monday to discuss efforts to overthrow President Saddam Hussein, as the opposition tried to woo Arab states which Baghdad has alienated. Ayatollah Mohammad Bager Al Hakim, leader of the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), met Sheikh Jaber Al Ahmad Al Sabah in Kuwait City, the group said in a statement received in Dubai. It said Hakim called for "Arab solidarity with the Iraqi people to get rid of the dictatorship."

Iraq declares ceasefire in verbal war with Egypt

BAGHDAD (AFP) — Iraq's influential Babel newspaper on Monday said it had declared a ceasefire in its vitriolic war of words with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak.

The daily, run by eldest son of the Iraqi president Uday Saddam Hussein, said the move was designed to avoid the campaign's "exploitation by the American and Zionist enemies."

"Babel and the non-governmental weeklies believe President Mubarak has received the message and has decided to end its campaign from Tuesday," the newspaper told its readers.

The campaign followed remarks by Mubarak that he blamed Saddam Hussein for his people's continuing plight. His reproach was the latest in

a series of bitter Egyptian attacks on Iraq.

"Our American and Zionist enemies have begun to exploit this press campaign to widen the gap between the Iraqi and Egyptian people," Babel said, calling on Mubarak to "learn history's lessons."

But prior to the ceasefire, Iraq's press launched its fourth day of vitriolic attacks Monday on Mubarak, accusing him of delaying an Arab summit at which Baghdad hoped to win strong backing.

The ceasefire came as a newspaper with close links to Qatar's foreign ministry on Monday urged Iraq and Egypt to end their conflict saying it "only serves the enemies of the Arab nation."

"The Iraqis are suffering to survive, to have milk and medicine. They are distanced

from this war of words, as are the Egyptian people who demonstrated in the street their support for the Iraqis," Al-Watan said.

There were large demonstrations in Egypt in support of Baghdad during the four-day U.S. and British bombings of Iraq that ended December 20.

At his first cabinet meeting of the new year Saddam Hussein lashed out at unnamed Arab nations that were "traitors participating in the plot of aggression against Iraq," Iraq's official INA news agency said Sunday.

Ties between Egypt and Iraq were broken during the 1991 Gulf War by Baghdad. But 1998 saw a thaw which included a visit by Iraq's Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz to Cairo.

Car set on fire at Arabic newspaper

NEW YORK (AP) — A manager at a prominent Arabic newspaper says the business received harassing telephone calls before a car was driven inside the paper's printing facility and set afire.

The message, in Arabic, "was someone cursing, but there were no specifics, no nothing," said Yazid Mourani, president of Media Marketing Research.

Police said a 1992 Mitsubishi was driven through a steel gate at the Al Hayat facility in Queens on Friday afternoon and set on fire. It caused minor damage to the building, where newspapers are printed for New York City, but there were no injuries and no arrests.

In January 1997, letter bombs were sent to offices for the newspaper in Washington, in London and at the

United Nations. Two people were injured when the bomb sent to the London office exploded. The other bombs were discovered before they detonated.

The newspaper, owned by a member of the Saudi royal family, is one of the largest and most influential Arabic-language papers in the world and is popular among expatriates in the West. Although it has run articles criticising Saddam Hussein and fundamentalism, its general news coverage is considered unbiased with moderate editorial positions.

A terrorism task force of local and federal law enforcement officials was investigating.

Newspaper officials who could comment further were not immediately available this morning.

JORDAN TIMES DAILY GUIDE AND CALENDAR

JORDAN TELEVISION

Tel. 4773111-19

PROGRAMME TWO

15:10 Children's French programme
15:30 Canon - Bananas in Pyjamas
16:00 Doc - Life Choices
16:30 Ch. 2 links with Ch. 1
17:10 Doc - Mothers of the Wild
18:15 Omar Ben Abdul Aziz
19:00 Le Journal
19:15 Words of Wisdom
19:30 News headlines
19:35 Comedy - Step by Step
20:00 Journey Across the World of Islam
20:30 Drama - Tom Jones
21:05 Doc - You and Your Car
21:30 UN Cut
22:00 News in English
22:30 Lonesome Dove
23:10 Feature film - "Rave"
00:30 End of T.X.

PRAYER TIMES

04:55 Fajr
05:10 (Sunrise) Doha
11:41 Dhulh
14:27 Asr
16:50 Maghreb
18:12 Isha

CHURCHES

St. Mary of Nazareth Church
Sweidat, Tel. 5920740
Assemblies of God Church Tel.
4632785

St. Joseph Church Tel. 4624590

Terra Santa Church Tel. 4622366

Anglican Church Tel.
4624853/4624811

St. Aftem Syrian Orthodox
Church Tel. 4771751

Amman International Church
Tel. 5865897

German-speaking Evangelical
Congregation Tel. 5688404

The Evangelical Local Church
in Amman Tel. 5811295

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter
Day Saints Tel. 4654932

St. John the Baptist at De la
Salle College Tel. 5661757

Church of the Annunciation
Tel. 4637440

Greek Orthodox Church Tel.
4646138

Church of Presentation, Sweidat
Tel. 5920146

The Uniate Catholic Church
Tel. 4624757

The English-Language
Catholic Parish Tel. 4614190

Evangelical Free Church Tel.
4892679

The Baptist Church Tel.
4628052

The Armenian Catholic
Church Tel. 4771331

The American Orthodox
Church Tel. 4775261

WEATHER

Bulletin supplied by the Department of Meteorology

Relative cold weather conditions will prevail, skies partly cloudy, and winds southeasterly to southwesterly moderate. In Agaba, winds will be northerly moderate, and seas calm.

Amman04/16
Agaba10/23
Deserts03/17
Jordan Valley12/21

Yesterday's high temperatures:
Amman 17, Agaba 22 Humidity readings: Amman 29 per cent, Agaba 40 per cent.

Following are the temperatures expected today in the following areas:

Ajloun03/11
Jerash07/18
Um Qays06/17
Madaba03/15
Petra02/17
Dead Sea12/24

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

NIGHT DUTY

AMMAN:
Dr. Walid Al Masri4675485
Dr. Yousef Rashid4875792
Dr. Jum'a Abu Dhiab4758848
Dr. Khalil Jbali4784450

AMMAN:
Firas Pharmacy5661912
Al Salam Pharmacy 4636730
Mayadah Pharmacy 5537004
Ruka Al Dawa Pharmacy 5536169

IRBID:
Dr. Lutfi Shibli02/241789
Fou'ad Pharmacy 102/27360

ZARQA:
Dr. Walid Halaseh09/982799
Palestine Pharmacy 109/983562

EMERGENCIES

Food Control Centre4637111
Civil Defence Department 5661111
Civil Defence Immediate Rescue4630341
Civil Defence Emergency199
Rescue Police 192 4621111 4637777
Fire Brigade4617101
Blood Bank4775121
Highway Police5345402
Traffic Police4896390
Public Security Dept 4630321
Hotel Complaints5605800
Price Complaints5661176
Water & Sewage Complaints 4894767
Amman Municipality Complaints4787111
Telephone Information (directory assistance)121
Overseas Calls0132
Central Amman Telephone Repairs4623101

Abdali Tel. Repairs5661101
Jordan Television4773111
Radio Jordan4774111
Water Authority5680100
J. Electricity Authority 5815615
Electric Power Co. 4632381
RJ Flight Information 44-53200
Queen Alia Intl. Airport 44-53200

HOSPITALS

AMMAN:
The Arab Centre for Heart and Special Surgery5921199
The Islamic Abdi5666131/7
Hussein Medical Centre 5856856
Luzmila4630195
Khalidi Maternity4644281/6
Akileh Maternity4642441/2
Jabal Amman Maternity4642362
Malhas, J. Amman4636140
Palestine, Shmeisani5607071
Shmeisani Hospital5607431
Jordan Hospital5607550
University Hospital5353444
Al-Muasher Hospital 56672719
Al-Ahli, Abdali5664164/6
Italian, Al-Muhajreen 4777101/3
Al-Bashir4775111/26
Army, Marka4891611/15
Queen Alia Hospital5157100
Arnal Hospital5607155
Al Amal Cancer Centre 5353000

ZARQA:
Zarqa Govt. Hospital 09/983323
Zarqa National Hospital 09/900560
Ibn Sina Hospital 09/986731

Al Hilma Modern Hospital
10:05 Muscat, Dubai (RJ)
10:15 Doha, Bahrain (RJ)
16:40 Cairo (RJ)
17:30 Chicago, Amsterdam (RJ)
20:10 Vienna (add) (RJ)
21:00 London, Frankfurt (RJ)
23:10 Beirut (RJ)
03:00 Jeddah (add) (RJ)
07:15 Jeddah (add) (RJ)

IBRD:
Princess Basma Hospital 02/275555
Roman Catholic Hospital 02/27275
Ibn Al Nafies Hospital 02/7101372, 02/7103101
Rosary Sisters Hospital 02/7102831, 02/7102011
Specialty Hospital 02/7103100

AQABA:
Princess Haya Hospital 03/2040111

FOR THE TRAVELLER QUEEN ALIA AIRPORT

This information is supplied by Royal Jordanian (RJ) information department at the Queen Alia International Airport Tel. (44)53200-5, where it should always be verified. Information on other flights can be supplied on phone 44 (52700). Information on Royal Wings flights can be supplied on phone 4875201-5

ARRIVALS

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights
07:25 Agaba (add) (RJ)
07:30 Damascus (RJ)
09:50 Tehran, Abu Dhabi (RJ)

Other Flights
12:30 Aden (TY)
14:35 Istanbul (TK)
18:00 Dubai, Damascus (EK)
18:40 Beirut (ME)
18:45 Kiev (6U)
19:05 Paris (AF)
20:25 Tel Aviv (LY)
20:40 Cairo (MS)
22:25 London, Damascus (BA)
23:35 Amsterdam (KL)
23:55 Larnaca (CY)
00:35 Bucharest (RO)
02:00 Rome (AZ)

Royal Wings (RW) Flights
09:30 Agaba (arriving at QAIA) (RW)
11:10 Agaba (arriving at Marka Airport) (RW)
16:00 Agaba (arriving at Marka Airport) (RW)
18:45 Tel Aviv (arriving at QAIA) (RW)
22:50 Agaba (arriving at Marka Airport) (RW)

Royal Wings (RW) Flights
07:00 Agaba (from Marka Airport) (RW)
08:30 Agaba (from Marka Airport) (RW)
16:30 Tel Aviv (from Marka Airport) (RW)
20:30 Agaba (from QAIA) (RW)

Other Flights
07:10 Frankfurt (LH)
13:30 Aden (TY)
15:35 Istanbul (TK)
19:00 Dubai (EK)
19:40 Kiev (6U)
20:00 Beirut (ME)
21:10 Tel Aviv (LY)
21:40 Cairo (MS)
00:35 Amsterdam (KL)
01:55 Bucharest (RO)
03:00 Rome (AZ)

Royal Wings (RW) Flights
07:00 Agaba (from Marka Airport) (RW)
08:30 Agaba (from Marka Airport) (RW)
16:30 Tel Aviv (from Marka Airport) (RW)
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Government sets March deadline for illegal workers to rectify status

AMMAN (J.T.) — In what seems to be a determined move to deal with the problem of illegal workers and rising unemployment among Jordanians, Prime Minister Fayez Tarawneh announced Monday that illegal workers who have failed to rectify their status by the end of March will be forced to leave the country.

Emerging from a meeting of the Higher Committee on Unemployment, Tarawneh said non-Jordanian workers who are found lacking valid work and residency permits within three months will not be allowed to stay on and the concerned authorities will ask them to leave Jordan.

"We will not tolerate any disregard of the existing laws and at the same time we welcome non-Jordanian workers who abide by the law and are legally employed. We secure for them full rights," said the prime minister.

Tarawneh said to date only 121,000 non-Jordanian workers have complied with the labour law, accord-

ing to figures supplied by the ministers of labour and interior.

No accurate figures of guest workers are available but some estimates put their numbers at around one million at a time when Jordan faces up to 25 per cent unemployment among its workforce.

'We will not tolerate any disregard of the existing laws' — Tarawneh

The Public Security Department said late last month that scores of illegal foreign workers are being deported almost daily.

According to the prime minister a large number of guest workers are not willing to rectify their status

and have not acquired work and residency permits.

According to government officials, Egyptian nationals make up almost half of the number of guest workers in Jordan. An agreement reached by the Egyptian and Jordanian governments dictates procedures which require an Egyptian to obtain work permit before arriving in the Kingdom.

The prime minister said the committee on unemployment has put forth a number of suggestions such as creating a fund for the unemployed, but he did not say if any decision was taken in this regard.

Referring to an earlier proposal to reintroduce compulsory national service in either the military or civil institutions, the prime minister said the proposal has been studied in conjunction with the Jordan Armed Forces Command and the Ministry of Administrative Development. He said the committee will discuss the draft project in the next meeting.

Engineers criticise sales tax, predict closure of 1,000 offices

By Mohammad Ben Hussein

AMMAN — The Jordanian Consulting Engineering Bureau on Monday criticised the government's decision to charge its members sales tax and described it as the straw that broke the camel's back.

"The new tax law will force many consulting engineers offices to close down or minimise their operation," said Khalid Borini, chairman of the Jordanian Consulting Engineering Bureau.

In 1994, the government passed a law obliging engineering consulting offices to pay a tax of 10 per cent of its sales if operations exceed JD100,000 annually. In late 1998, the Council of Ministers made an amendment to the 1994 law to demand offices selling more than JD25,000 annually to pay the tax as well.

"The new amendment is a big burden on offices across the country considering how hard the current recession has hit the country," said Borini.

The engineering sector in Jordan suffers from both rampant joblessness and disguised unemployment.

"The new taxes will lead to further complication of the engineers' problems," said Borini, owner of a consulting engineering office.

The local market requires only 3,000 engineers while there are around 5,000 working in consulting offices across the country, he said.

Customs Department officials declined to comment on the issue.

"The 1994 law forced around 200 offices to suspend their work," Borini said. "The current amendment will lead to the closure of 1,000 offices at least."

There are around 12,000 offices currently operating in the Kingdom.

"If the government insists on its decision, many engineers will join the long list of their unemployed colleagues, when offices will be forced to dismiss them," he added.

According to Borini, the Customs Department would receive around JD300,000 a year from the sales tax which is insignificant in comparison to the damage will inflict on people employed in this sector.

"At the end of the day, the common citizen, with limited income, will pay the tax not the offices," he said.

The bureau called on the government to reconsider its decision and return to the 1994 law.

"If the government insists on charging offices, we suggest that the tax be directly enforced on those applying for a building licence,"

added the engineer.

The Jordan Consulting Engineering Bureau is scheduled to hold a general assembly meeting at the end of this month to discuss the issue and possible alternatives to combat the tax.

Jordanian medical aid to Iraq awaits government approval

By Mohammad Ben Hussein

AMMAN — The Jordan Pharmacists Association is awaiting government approval to send a shipment of pharmaceutical products to Iraq in defiance of the U.N. economic sanctions imposed on that country, Abdul Rahim Issa, head of the association said Monday.

The association, whose members own 1,600 pharmacies and 12 pharmaceutical factories, was scheduled to send the first shipment on Monday but the association was surprised by the government's delay in giving the green light.

"The products, scheduled to be exported to Iraq, were originally designated for the Jordanian markets, which requires the association to obtain a special permission from the Ministry of Industry and Trade and the Interior Ministry to export them to Iraq," said Issa.

The Council of Presidents of the Union of Professional Associations has given the thumbs-up to the Jordan Pharmacists Association in its decision and considered it as a reflection of the desire of the Arab street.

"The Pharmacists Association's decision represents all professional associations in the country," said Basem

Dajani the current chairman of the associations council of presidents.

"The association will not wait for approval from the United Nations and if [U.N. inspectors will not allow us in], the trucks will turn back," said Issa.

Issa said the association had asked all drug stores, factories and medical equipment stores in Jordan to contribute to the shipment.

United Nations sanctions imposed on Iraq after its 1990 invasion of Kuwait ban it from importing or exporting most goods.

Humanitarian items such as food and medicine are allowed in, but every sold or donated goods must be approved by the U.N. sanctions monitoring committee. The committee's job is to ensure that any exports to Iraq cannot be used in its weapons industries.

Issa said the association plans to sell the drugs in Iraq at low prices and is in contact with the Iraqi side to inform them about their decision.

However, Iraqi embassy officials in Amman said they had not been contacted by the union.

Issa urged other business associations in Jordan and in Arab countries to defy the embargo.

The associations last

month began a boycott of American and British drugs, medical equipment and other goods to protest the air strikes on Iraq from Dec. 16 to Dec. 19.

Some association members have scorned the boycott decision and described it as impractical since the Jordanian market cannot manage without American and British products. Such a boycott was earlier launched but failed for the same reason.

The 13-member council on Sunday formed a special committee to follow up the latest development in the donations campaign initiated by the associations to help the Iraqi people. The committee is comprised of Hosni Abu Ghaida, head of the 38,000 members Engineers Association and Abdul Rahim Issa head of the Pharmacists Association.

Iraq earlier refused to take humanitarian aid from any party and called on lifting the sanctions instead.

The 100,000-member Professional Associations, known for their pro-Iraqi and anti-Israeli activism are currently in contact with different Arab professional associations and hope to hold a general meeting of the Arab Professional Associations.

The meeting is scheduled to be held either in Jordan or in Egypt.

Agriculture ministry explores ways to deal with drought conditions

AMMAN (J.T.) — The potential for drought next summer dominated a meeting Monday of the Ministry of Agriculture's Planning Committee, now concerned that this winter's lack of rainfall may bear negatively on the agricultural sector.

The meeting chaired by Minister of Agriculture Mijhem Khreisha, discussed ways to reduce the effects on the public and boost coordination among the various concerned government departments and ministries in this respect.

The ministry plans to contact specialised international agencies with experience in coping with drought conditions to help Jordan overcome the problems that may arise from a drought, according to a statement released following the meeting.

The committee also discussed the water ministry's decision to restrict the amount of water which farmers consume from artesian wells and its proposal that the farmers pay the cost of extra water used on their farms if consumption exceeds the 50,000 cubic metres level allowed them every year.

The ministry said that a technical committee of specialists from the ministry and other concerned departments has been formed to conduct a comprehensive and integrated study on the effects of drought and the exploitation of the artesian wells for irrigation. The committee will submit practical recommendations to deal with an emergency situation.

Minister of Water and Energy Hani Mulki told Parliament at a regular session Sunday that the government has drawn up a plan to face problems that could arise in connection with water shortages next summer.

The plan entails controlling the use of water from 1,654 artesian well-owners as part of a national effort to combat illegal water usage.

The Water Authority last week referred 1,500 cases to court involving residents who allegedly illegally received water either by tampering with or damaging water meters.

The planning committee at the Ministry of Agriculture also reviewed the country's preparations for Arbor Day ceremonies to be held starting January 15.

The ministry said it plans to involve all public and private sector institutions in tree planting around the country supplying thousands of tree saplings from its nurseries.

Deputies expected to lift immunity of Deputy Abbadi

By Tareq Momani

AMMAN — The Legal Committee of the Lower House of Parliament is likely to recommend that the House lift the immunity of Deputy Ahmad Oweidi Abbadi so that he can be questioned in connection with two cases of alleged sexual assault, parliamentarians said Sunday.

However, lifting immunity cannot be used for the purpose of detention, said Deputy Mahmoud Kharabsheh, rapporteur of the Legal Committee, currently examining the cases referred to it by the House's Speaker Abdul Hadi Majali.

Emerging from the committee meeting, chaired by Deputy Ghaleb Zu'bi, Kharabsheh said committee members studied the documents pertaining to the two cases and the charges levelled against Abbadi, who has been accused of "committing rape" and "damaging marital bonds."

According to Kharabsheh, the committee's opinion is not unified.

According to House regulations, cases concerning the immunity of deputies are referred to the legal committee for review. The committee issues recommendations to the House

within a two-week period of time.

The Jordanian Constitution states that senators and deputies shall not be subject to court prosecution while Parliament is in session unless an absolute majority of the Lower House finds enough evidence to allow prosecution.

Abbadi has denied the allegations levelled against him, and the husband of the woman who filed one of the sexual assault cases against the deputy has dropped charges. But the legal committee says the husband's decision to drop charges does not mean that the case is dropped at the Lower House.

Following the committee's meetings on Monday, Kharabsheh said committee members were of the opinion that the Parliament should facilitate procedures for questioning Abbadi but not for detaining him because, he said, the legal committee cannot act on behalf of the judiciary.

Kharabsheh said the committee decided the postpone discussion of the issue until next Saturday when it is expected to take a decision, noting that the Parliament is keen to facilitate the work of the judicial system.

what's going on

FILM

- "The Rock" at Books@Café, Jabal Amman at 8:30 p.m. (Tel. 4630457).

EXHIBITIONS

- Photo exhibition at the Royal Cultural Centre, until Jan. 16.
- Exhibition of ceramics, sculpture, and abstract (plastic) art by Jordanian, Iraqi, Syrian, Lebanese, and Sudanese artists at Hammoumabi Art Gallery, Gardens Street (Tel. 5536098), until Jan. 25.
- Exhibition of Nabataean silver jewelry at the Jordan Design and Trade Centre, off Wadi Saqra Street, until Jan. 15 (Tel. 56991412).
- "The Warm Winter" — works by several artists at Orfali Art Gallery, Um Uthaina (Tel. 5526932), until Feb. 1.
- The Tenth Anniversary Exhibition of Contemporary Arab Artists at Darat Al Funun, Jabal Weibdeh (Tel. 4643251/2), until Jan. 28.

News in brief

Computerised passports to be issued

AMMAN (Petra) — The Civil Registration and Passport Department will issue new computerised passports later this year, meeting international specifications, the Department's Director General Awni Yaras said. Yaras added that the new specifications will make it easier for the computer to process passports within a minute without causing passengers any delay at crossing points and airports.

Mamsar delivers Ramadan food packages

AMMAN (Petra) — Minister of Social Development Mohammad Kheir Mamsar Monday distributed 115 food packages to poor families in Al Qaisieb neighbourhood in Abdoun, heralding the launch of a JD80,000 project, entitled "Fast-Breaking" project. The project is being implemented by the ministry in cooperation with the U.S. Holy Land Institute for Relief and Development.

Majali receives thanks from Iraq's Hammadi

AMMAN (Petra) — Speaker of the Lower House of Parliament Abdul Hadi Majali Monday received a message from his Iraqi counterpart Sa'doun Hammadi, in which he expressed the Iraqi Peoples Assembly's satisfaction with the results of the emergency session of the Arab Parliamentary Union (APU), held here late last month. Hammadi noted the Jordanian Parliament's contribution to the adoption by the APU of a decision calling for lifting the embargo on Iraq.

Biltaji receives delegation

AQABA (Petra) — Minister of Tourism and Antiquities Aqel Biltaji Monday received two delegations of tour operators. One 130 member delegation from Belgium and another from other European countries were briefed on the historical importance of archaeological sites in Jordan. The Belgian delegation will visit Petra, Wadi Rum and Aqaba. Three months ago, a group of European tour operators signed contracts with a Jordanian tour operators to organise group tours to the Kingdom. Under the contract, a total of 140 tourists will visit Jordan every week for one year.

Consumer society praises government

AMMAN (Petra) — The National Society for Consumer Protection (NSCP) Monday applauded efforts by the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources and other parties concerned to overcome the shortage of butane gas in the Kingdom. NSCP President Mohammad Obeidat said. In a statement to Petra, Obeidat said the ministry's efforts addressed this crisis in record time. Obeidat called on citizens to buy only their immediate needs of gas cylinders, and not to stockpile them in order to avoid the recurrence of a similar gas crisis, and requested the Jordan Petroleum Refinery Company (JPRC) of a similar gas crisis, and requested the Jordan Petroleum Refinery Company (JPRC) to prepare policies, plans and programmes to ensure gas reserves for six months. Obeidat warned against manipulating gas cylinder weights and prices, saying that anyone who is found guilty of doing so will be referred to court.

Al Bashir Hospital gets ready for five-year expansion project

Tarawneh hears patient complaints

AMMAN (Petra) — Prime Minister Fayez Tarawneh said Monday the government will modernise and expand the services of Al Bashir Hospital in Amman in order to enable it to deal with the ever-increasing demand and improve medical services of the hospital's various departments.

Speaking during a visit to the hospital, the prime minister said the Council of Ministers recently gave its consent to expand the hospital, adding that work on the scheme, which takes five years, will start by the middle of this year.

The prime minister, who toured the different sections of the hospital, emphasised the government's keenness to reduce the pressure on the hospital's sections and guarantee a high standard of service to the public.

Tarawneh attended a briefing by hospital director Mahmoud Awad, who noted that in addition to providing primary health care services, Al Bashir hospital serves as a training centre for students of medicine and nursing as well as the training of doctors preparing to sit the Jordan Medical Board examination.

According to Awad, Al Bashir receives nearly 12,000 outpatients on a daily basis, and in 1997 the hospital admitted 60,000 patients for treatment. In the same year, he said the hospital provided medical service to 500,000 outpatients and dealt with 350,000 first aid and emergency cases according to Awad.

He told the prime minister that Al Bashir hospital conducts nearly 22,000 surgical operations annually in its 24 operation theatres.

Minister of Health Na'el Ajlouni outlined the main problems and difficulties facing the hospital, noting that different sections are in need of constant maintenance. He pointed out that doctors require higher pay to be on a par with doctors in the private sector and others in other government-run hospitals.

Ajlouni said one way to ease pressure lies in building new hospitals and cooperating with private sector hospitals to offer medical services.

But he added that work is under way for the construction of the Hamzeh Hospital which should help ease

pressure on Al Bashir. Hamzeh Hospital will have a cooperation agreement with Al Amal Cancer Centre.

In touring the hospital's wards, the prime minister met patients who talked about the medical services and heard their complaints. Following the tour, the prime minister told Jordan Television that Al Bashir Hospital, a complex housing a cluster of smaller facilities, is one of the oldest hospitals in the Kingdom that serves not only Amman residents, but also patients referred to it from other parts of the Kingdom.

He said the hospital is facing heavy pressure and the staff are overburdened with work. Tarawneh said he had learnt from the patients a number of complaints such as having to wait up to two to three months for necessary operations, or even X-rays due to the congestion created by thousands of people seeking medical attention each day.

The prime minister said the government plans to conclude agreements with private sector hospitals to handle part of the burden facing Al Bashir.

16 killed in Pakistan mosque massacre

MULTAN, Pakistan (AFP) — Gunmen massacred at least 16 people Monday when they burst into a temple just after dawn prayers and opened fire in one of the worst Muslim sectarian attacks, officials said.

Eight people from the Shiite Muslim mosque died instantly while others died on the way to hospital, where 13 others were reported to be in critical condition.

Pakistan has seen mounting tension between extremist groups of the minority Shiite community and the majority Sunnis.

The latest attack was immediately condemned by the government.

Officials said four assailants took part in the killings in Karamad Koreshi, 50 kilometres west of the Punjab city of Multan.

The victims included the principal of a Shiite school. Shops closed as the killings triggered demonstrations in towns in Punjab province where protesters demanded immediate action.

Witnesses said even before the bodies had been removed from the mosque students blocked traffic with burning tyres.

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif vowed his government would take the "terror-

ists" to task.

Stressing that Muslims could not imagine the "devilish act of shedding the blood of innocent people during the holy month of Ramadan," he said: "Anti-state elements are carrying out these nefarious acts to create instability in the country."

The attack came less than 24 hours after Sharif narrowly escaped an assassination bid, when a bomb exploded on a road he had been due to travel along.

The bomb was planted under a bridge close to his family farm near Lahore, about 200 kilometres north-east of Multan.

The bomb killed three civilians.

Officials said two men with Kalashnikov rifles entered the mosque and sprayed worshippers with bullets as they listened to a sermon after dawn prayers.

Another kept watch at the gate while a fourth drove the attackers away after the shooting, they said.

Residents said the mosque was crowded for Ramadan prayers and the attack triggered immediate panic.

Sources said at least 12 people with serious injuries were admitted to hospitals in Multan and the nearby city of Muzaffargarh.

Religious vendettas between militants of the

majority Sunni and the minority Shiite communities have claimed several hundred lives in the past two years.

Monday's killings came only two weeks after a special anti-terrorism court sentenced to death 14 people from Shiite and Sunni extremist groups for sectarian murders.

The convicts included eight Sunnis accused of killing Iranian diplomat Muhammad Ali Rahimi and seven employees in an attack on Iranian cultural centre in Multan in February 1997.

Six others were Shiite extremists accused of killing 22 Sunni Muslims in an attack on a mosque in September 1996.

Shiites form about 20 per cent of the 140 million population in Pakistan.

The country has been plagued by sectarian violence blamed on rivalry between the extremist Sunni group Sipah-i-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP) and their Shiite counterparts, Sipah-i-Muhammad Pakistan (SMP).

In January 1997, 26 people including SSP chief Ziaur Rehman Farooqi were killed when a bomb exploded in a court in Lahore.

A police official said security had been tightened after Monday's massacre.



Opposition party leader of the Singapore Democratic Party (SDP) Chee Soon Juan speaks to reporters after leaving the subordinate court. Chee pleaded not guilty to giving a political talk without an official permit, and declared outside the court that he will stage another illegal rally (AFP photo)

Singapore opposition politician to defy police

SINGAPORE (R) — A Singapore opposition politician pleaded not guilty Monday to a charge of making a speech without a permit and vowed to continue speaking even if he is detained without trial under the Internal Security Act (ISA).

Chee Soon Juan, leader of the small opposition Singapore Democratic Party, told Reuters he would not back away from giving public speeches because he needed to "bypass the state media" and "find a different way to communicate with the people."

Chee appeared in court to be charged with giving a public speech on Dec. 29 without the permit the law requires all public speakers to obtain.

Police said at the time Chee refused to accept a written warning that he was about to make a speech without a permit and ignored a verbal warning not to go ahead.

He pleaded not guilty to the charge which carries a maximum penalty of a fine of up to Singapore \$5,000 (\$3,000).

"I cannot be guilty of something that the constitution of my country guarantees," he told the court when asked to

enter a plea. Freedom of speech is enshrined in Singapore's constitution.

Chee's case will go to trial next week.

Speaking to reporters afterwards, Chee said it was "very possible" he would be arrested under the ISA.

"I want to remind the government that they cannot continue to arbitrarily arrest citizens of Singapore," he said.

"If they so decide to use the Internal Security Act on me then there is nothing we can do. But I want to warn them also not to underestimate the will of the Singapore people," he said.

The ISA allows the detention of anyone deemed a threat to national security without trial for renewable two-year periods.

There was no immediate comment from the Singapore government, which says the ISA remains relevant to deal with racial and religious extremism, international terrorism, espionage and subversion.

"I think if you look at it not in a political partisan way, you will see that Singaporeans do not live in fear," junior Law and Home Affairs minister Ho

Peng Kee told parliament in May 1997 while rejecting opposition charges that the ISA helped deter Singaporeans from expressing criticism.

"But do we use it freely, wantonly? We don't," he said of the ISA. "But as a law, I think it ought to remain because it will be a good measure to fall back on if the need arises."

The last time Singapore arrested anyone under the ISA was in the late 1980s when 22 people were arrested for being involved in an alleged Marxist conspiracy against the government.

Chee plans to give another public speech Tuesday at the heart of the business district.

Chee said he would be pressing for the government to "guarantee and give Singaporeans the right to be able to peacefully assemble, associate and speak freely."

Chee's party has no representation in parliament after its two members lost their seats in the last general elections held in January 1997, when the People's Action Party (PAP) won 81 out of the 83 elected seats.

NEWS IN BRIEF

French interior minister back to work, four months after coma

PARIS (AP) — His recovery now complete, French Interior Minister Jean-Pierre Chevènement returned to work Monday, four months after falling into a life-threatening coma during surgery. Government ministers, including Prime Minister Lionel Jospin, gathered early Monday to welcome him back at a breakfast at the interior ministry. "I'm as well as I possibly could be," said Chevènement. "I can tell you that my red cells have made it to the meeting I fixed for them." The minister's heart stopped for nearly an hour Sept. 2 after he suffered an allergic reaction to curare, a muscle relaxant, just before gall bladder surgery. He spent eight days in a coma. Chevènement, 59, recently joked that he had no choice but to wake from the coma. "God didn't want me, but the devil didn't either, so I came back," he said. A key figure in Socialist Prime Minister Lionel Jospin's cabinet, Chevènement has held several ministry portfolios in previous governments, including industry, education and defence. He resigned as defence minister in 1991 to protest France's involvement with the U.S.-led alliance in the Gulf War against Iraq. As interior minister, he is responsible for the nation's police and security forces.

'North Korea deploys ballistic missiles'

TOKYO (AFP) — North Korea has deployed Rodong-1 medium-range ballistic missiles on an "operational basis," Kyodo News agency said Monday, quoting a defence agency official. The defence agency reached the conclusion based on pictures taken by U.S. reconnaissance satellites, the unnamed official was quoted by the Japanese agency as saying. North Korea test-fired a Rodong-1 missile into the Sea of Japan in May 1993. The missile with a range of 1,300 kilometres is based on the former Soviet Union's Scud-C missile. A defence agency spokesman declined to confirm the report. Pyongyang launched a rocket over Japanese territory on Aug. 31 in order to put a satellite into orbit. But Tokyo insists it was almost certainly a Taepo-dong ballistic missile test. Tensions have mounted between the two countries as a U.S. official said last week North Korea was preparing for a second Taepo-dong missile test launch by the end of this year. News reports said last month that North Korea was constructing three underground sites for a ballistic missile launch.

13,000 homeless in China quake area

BEIJING (AFP) — An earthquake that hit remote southwestern China at the weekend caused little damage but raised fears among the 13,000 people homeless after a previous tremor, officials said Monday. "The quake Sunday was not so serious. It left two people injured and killed two cows and six sheep," said Mao Jingui, deputy director of the Ninglang Civil Affairs Bureau in southwestern Yunnan province. "But we still have the earthquake alarm in place, and between 12,000 and 13,000 people are still homeless and living in tents from the November earthquake," he said by telephone. Sunday's quake, measuring 5.0 on the Richter scale, struck in the same location as a deadly double quake on Nov. 19 which killed five people and left 25,000 homeless. The area is currently the focus of a concentrated area of seismic activity which started in August and has caused more than 1,290 tremors measuring 2.0 or more on the Richter scale. The region has received 3.3 million yuan (\$401,000) in relief donations following the November quake.

Viagra maker urges Hong Kongers to steer clear of black market

HONG KONG (AFP) — The makers of the male anti-impotency drug Viagra Monday urged people in Hong Kong to steer clear of black-market versions of the medicine before it is officially approved for sale here. "Recently we have been getting a lot of calls from people thinking that our drug has been approved and asking us where they can purchase it," a spokeswoman for Pfizer Corp. here told AFP. "It is not approved, and what they are getting on the black market is not approved by Pfizer and we cannot guarantee what they are getting." The Pharmacy and Poisons Board has given the go-ahead to import Viagra, but its sale still needs to be approved by the government of Hong Kong, where about 200,000 men are believed to be impotent. The Pfizer spokeswoman denied government pressure was behind the company's appeal. Hong Kong airport customs officers seized more than 9,200 Viagra tablets in the last six months of 1998. A 29-year-old Taiwanese man was arrested in November after arriving from Taipei with 180 Viagra tablets. In China, where Viagra is also still illegal, it is reported to be freely available particularly in neighbouring Guangdong province, where it can cost as much as 400 Hong Kong dollars (\$52) a tablet.

Three people killed in artillery shell blast

HANOI, Vietnam (AP) — Three people were killed and another was seriously injured when a war-era artillery shell went off as they tried to extract the explosives, police said Monday. The victims of Saturday's explosion ran a scrap iron shop in the northern province of Thanh Hoa and bought the shell from collectors, they said. Explosives are often used for limestone excavation or in dynamite fishing in the province. 160 kilometres south of Hanoi. Casualties from war-era ordnance are reported virtually every week in Vietnam as farmers seek scrap iron to make ends meet.

Aged burglar dies while breaking into apartment

WEINFELDEN, Switzerland (AP) — A 70-year-old burglar collapsed and died in an apartment he had broken into, Swiss police said Monday. The man used a master key to get into the apartment. The cause of his death has not been confirmed, police said. The body was discovered by the owner of the apartment, also an elderly man, Sunday afternoon. Police said the burglar, who has not been named, had a previous conviction for a similar offence.

Embattled press aide focus of feud in British cabinet

LONDON (AFP) — The political spin doctor at the centre of the row that forced two British government ministers to resign was back behind his desk Monday amid intense speculation that he would soon be out of a job.

The fate of Charlie Whelan is seen as an indicator of a long-running feud between Prime Minister Tony Blair and his Chancellor Gordon Brown, the man he beat to win the leadership of the Labour party in 1994.

Whelan is Brown's press aide, and is widely blamed — despite his denials — for a leak that led to the resignation of Blair confidant Peter Mandelson as trade and industry secretary.

The story, that discredited junior treasury minister Geoffrey Robinson had lent 373,000 pounds (\$625,000) to Mandelson at preferential rate, also cost Robinson his job.

Brown is said to be privately bitter that Mandelson, then Labour's public relations supremo, switched sides to back Blair for the party leadership in

1994. New grist was added to the mill with publication Monday in the British press of a memo Mandelson wrote to Brown advising him against standing against Blair.

Whelan has until now mostly been able to stay out of the public spotlight, but was met by a posse of reporters when he returned to his London home late Sunday after spending Christmas in the Scottish highlands.

Asked if he was going to resign, he said: "You will know in the morning."

Downing Street refused to be drawn into the speculation on Whelan's future. A spokesman insisted it was "a matter for the chancellor."

Yet however much Blair's office tries to steer clear of damaging publicity about a rift in the cabinet, a number of ministers are said to be calling for Whelan's resignation.

That at least is partly because of Whelan's ebullient style which includes briefings to favoured journalists.

Whelan's voluntary resignation would suit Blair, who would be free of his perceived trouble-making without being seen to lean on Brown.

The Guardian, which broke the Robinson loan story and has consistently denied Whelan was its source, reported Monday that he was ready to quit.

Friends of his apparently told the paper he would resign as soon as he had another job to go to, because he was dismayed at being the centre of so much press attention.

The Financial Times, too, said he was fed up with the personal attacks and had told friends he was ready to "walk out" of his job.

The 1994 Mandelson memo, written four days after the death of previous Labour leader John Smith, warned Brown, who is Scottish, that he lacked the appeal in southern England which Blair enjoyed.

Mandelson praised Brown for his political acumen, but said any attempt to stand against Blair without a guarantee of winning would hugely damage the party.

U.N. withdrawal to deepen Angolans' suffering

LUANDA (R) — The United Nations' planned withdrawal of peace observers and suspension of flights from Angola's war zones threaten to worsen the plight of thousands facing starvation and disease, aid workers said Monday.

The U.N. Observer Mission in Angola said Sunday it was suspending flights to Huambo after a second of its planes was shot down Saturday near the central city, the scene of fierce fighting between government troops and UNITA rebels.

The downing of the C-130 transport plane with eight people aboard led Issa Diallo, the U.N. head in Angola, to express doubts about the future of the world body's peace mission as the country's 1994 peace accord unravels and civil war resumes.

"I think that the security council and the secretary-general have been thinking about this for some time and

we will come to the point when a decision will be taken. I think it will be very soon," Diallo said Sunday.

He said he had ordered an immediate halt to all flights to Huambo and the withdrawal of U.N. observers from conflict areas.

A humanitarian worker said the U.N.'s decision placed Huambo's population of at least 150,000 and a further 100,000 refugees in the city at risk.

"If the air situation is broken, it means that increasingly in the next weeks or months... the whole population will be vulnerable," the worker told Reuters.

In Kuito, near Huambo, the situation remains dire, aid workers said. The government-held town is besieged by rebels of UNITA, the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola.

The Angolan Armed Forces said at the weekend it had reopened Kuito's airport, offering a glimmer of hope

that food supplies could be flown to the beleaguered town.

But the aid worker expressed fears that the renewed civil war could lead to a similar situation as that in 1993 and 1994, when UNITA forces besieged government towns for extended periods, leading to mass starvation and disease.

"If we end up the same as then, with totally besieged cities, then we will be moving to a catastrophe," a special representative of U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan arrived in Luanda on Monday for consultations with the government and the U.N. mission.

The visit follows the shooting down of two U.N. chartered C-130 aircraft within eight days. Attempts to secure cooperation from the government and UNITA have so far failed to result in search and rescue missions for either plane, although the government has pledged to help.

Experts hired by the United

Khmer Rouge warns against trying to seize comrades

PAILIN, Cambodia (R) — Comrades of two former Khmer Rouge leaders blamed for Cambodia's "killing fields" signalled Monday they would resist any attempt to abduct the pair from their remote haven.

The deputy governor of the former Khmer Rouge stronghold of Pailin, which Khieu Samphan and Nuon Chea have returned to after a visit to the capital Phnom Penh, made it clear the pair's old brothers in arms would protect them.

Asked if he feared an attempt would be made to snatch the two men from Pailin and put them on trial for the Khmer Rouge's 1970s reign of terror, deputy governor Ieng Vuth said: "I don't think the Americans would do that. If Americans would be killed it would impact on the credibility of the U.S. president."

No country has indicated an intention to use force to seize the two men, but Khmer Rouge expert Nate Thayer said the former guerrillas were very worried by such a prospect.

"Everyone there is terrified about the prospect of being brought before an international tribunal," said Thayer, who writes for the Far Eastern Economic Review and has close contacts with defectors in Pailin.

"Their military force is limited but they would fight against it," Washington has been vocal in calling for Khmer Rouge leaders to be brought to account. Experts hired by the United

Nations have been looking at the possibility of setting up a tribunal along the lines of those for Rwanda and Bosnia and are due to report at the end of the month.

Khieu Samphan and Nuon Chea — architects of the Khmer Rouge's 1975-79 agrarian revolution in which almost two million people died — quit the almost-defunct rebel movement last month and, in a visit to the capital, were feted by Premier Hun Sen.

Their VIP treatment, including a holiday at a beach resort, angered many survivors of the killing fields who want them tried. But the government allowed them Sunday to return to Pailin.

Prime Minister Hun Sen has said he supports a trial but this is up to the courts, not him, to arrange.

The government said that since no warrant existed for their arrest, they were free to travel wherever they wanted.

Political analysts say it would be difficult now to bring the two back from Pailin which, though nominally controlled by the government, is led by Ieng Sary, another Khmer Rouge leader who received a royal amnesty after his 1996 defection.

Ieng Vuth — who is Ieng Sary's son — said Khieu Samphan and Nuon Chea would remain based in Pailin but, according to government policy, were free to travel anywhere in Cambodia. "Everyone is aware that the

priority for Cambodia at the moment is national reconciliation," he said.

Ieng Vuth said the two men had returned to the town near Cambodia's border with Thailand Sunday after six days spent visiting Phnom Penh and other government-controlled towns.

He said they left Pailin Monday morning to visit relatives in the adjoining northwestern province of Battambang.

"They want to travel around as ordinary people to see how people react to them. In general they have been welcomed by everyone they meet," he said. "Reports about people shouting and cursing at them are untrue."

Many Cambodians interviewed by Reuters in the past week have expressed disgust at the government's red-carpet treatment of the men but said they felt powerless to influence their politicians.

However, the frustration boiled over for one man on Saturday who hurled abuse at the two as they left their Phnom Penh hotel. He blamed them for the deaths of 60 of his family.

Asked about relatives of those who died under the Khmer Rouge and who want to see the group's leaders tried, Ieng Vuth replied: "We don't want a trial to happen, but we understand how the relatives feel. If they want to make a case, no one can stop them."



Chinese archaeologists excavate terracotta warriors at the secluded number two pit of the tomb of China's first emperor, Qin Shihuangdi, in Xian. More than 6,000 terracotta figures of soldiers and horses have been excavated since the tomb was first uncovered in 1974. Xian, the capital of Shaanxi province in central China, was the capital (221-206 B.C.) of the Qin dynasty (Reuters photo)

Supreme Court orders delay of 1st Philippine execution in 23 years

MANILA, Philippines (AP) — Just three hours before a convicted rapist was to be put to death Monday, the Supreme Court ordered a six-month delay in the Philippines' first execution in 23 years.

Leo Echegaray, a poor house painter convicted of repeatedly raping his then 10-year-old stepdaughter, had been scheduled to die by lethal injection.

He was waiting by a prison death chamber for his execution when he was told of the court's ruling and wept with joy, a prison spokesman said.

About 100 anti-death penalty activists cheered outside the prison as a nearby church bell pealed. President Joseph Estrada expressed dismay, calling it a "sad day for law enforcement and the rule of law." In recent weeks, several lawmakers had expressed doubts whether capital punishment would deter crime and sought a congressional review of the law that restored the death penalty in 1994.

In its 8-5 ruling, the Supreme Court said "the merest chance that the Congress might reconsider" the law required that Echegaray, 38, be granted a postponement.

"This is definitely a victory, a significant first step in abolishing the death penalty in this country," said Echegaray's lawyer, Theodore Te.

Estrada, who has pledged to solve the country's serious crime problems, said the court overstepped its role of enforcing existing laws and promised to veto any new law repealing the death penalty.

Echegaray's stepdaughter, now 15, said she was disappointed that many people, including church officials, sympathized with Echegaray.

"They don't understand what's happening to me now and what I'm feeling," the sobbing stepdaughter told reporters.

Echegaray, who was convicted in 1994, is the first among more than 800 death-row inmates to be

scheduled for execution. More than 450 of those on death row were convicted of rape, including 159 who abused their own children or other relatives.

Other death row prisoners shouted Echegaray's name in a deafening chant as he returned Monday to his cell, the prison chaplain said.

Officials at his prison in Muntinlupa, a Manila suburb, had set up barbed wire roadblocks and deployed extra military and police guards to hold back large numbers of reporters and the anti-death penalty activists.

Echegaray's scheduled execution set off a debate among many Filipinos over the death penalty. Several Manila radio stations opened their telephone lines so listeners could express their views.

Pro-death penalty activists who also rallied outside the prison condemned the court's ruling.

"They're siding with the criminals," said Eduardo Chan as he waved a photograph of his 12-year-old

daughter, who was gang-raped and killed in 1995. "They should have executed him so that others will have fear in their hearts," President Joseph Estrada earlier turned down appeals from the Vatican, the European Union and Canada that the Philippines not resume capital punishment, saying he was obliged to follow the law.

Between 1924 and 1976, the Philippines executed 84 people. In 1987, a new constitution abolished the death penalty but gave Congress the option of restoring it for "heinous" crimes such as murder, kidnapping, rape and drug trafficking.

Legislators, alarmed by a rise in crime, brought back capital punishment in January 1994. Roman Catholic bishops and other civic groups opposing the death penalty say there is no proof capital punishment deters crime. They also say poor people are more likely to be sentenced to death because they cannot afford good lawyers.

Nazarbayev shrugs off criticism of Kazakh democracy days before vote

ALMATY (AFP) — President Nursultan Nazarbayev shrugged off mounting criticism of Kazakhstan's democracy Monday, days before a presidential vote which some opponents charge has been engineered in his favour.

Nazarbayev told AFP in a written interview that he supported the formation of a multi-party system, local popular elections and an independent media as cornerstones of democracy. But he warned that such reforms in the former Soviet central Asian republic must be introduced gradually.

"I don't accept just any flavour of democracy, if chaos, inter-ethnic feuds and people taking up arms ensue in the country under it," Nazarbayev said.

The Kazakh president has been criticised for his country's failure to uphold democratic standards in an election Sunday from which his main challenger, former premier Akezhan Kazhegeldin, was banned from running on charges of minor administrative violations.

Nazarbayev however vowed to make the election process fair in the hopes of improving his country's tar-

nished image abroad.

"I think the best way to dispel any and all suspicions is openness and the transparency of the ongoing process," he said, pointing out that workers from the Organisation of Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and other election observers have not met with any obstacles.

OSCE officials had asked the government to delay the vote so that the organisation could complete its preparations for the polls, but Kazakh officials refused to change the election date.

The OSCE request followed the government's unexpected decision to move up the presidential elections by one year, thus giving Nazarbayev's opponents less time to mount their campaigns.

If reelected, Nazarbayev said he would lead Kazakhstan through its second stage of transition now that the first step — economic liberalisation — has been completed.

"After the first stage when a state system was formed and the economy was liberalised, we crossed to the next task — the creation of a real multi-party system, an increased role of non-governmental organisations

and the creation of conditions to transfer part of the functions from the state to self-educated political institutions," he said.

Nazarbayev said a plan now being formulated for the election of a number of deputies in the lower house of parliament, the Majilis, on the basis of party lists is already causing political parties to become more active.

One of the next reforms would be a programme to elect mayors and regional governors, he said.

However, the president in the interview was vague about a time line for these and other reforms.

"It's not possible to exactly plan when and in what size certain political reforms will be conducted," he said. "For this, it is always important that the conditions ripen for their introduction."

Nazarbayev linked further political reforms and Kazakhstan's readiness for them with the population's ability to understand the basic principles of a market economy.

After more than 70 years of totalitarian rule, there is a "significant part of society that demonstrates and inability to adapt to market

principles) and there are people who simply don't wish to recognise true capitalists," he said.

Nazarbayev said the economic and political crises in Russia and Southeast Asia only strengthened his belief that democratisation must follow the economic part of the transition to a market economy.

While Nazarbayev had been loath to admit earlier this year that the financial crises would affect Kazakhstan, now he said, "the situation in the economy has become a little complicated."

The Kazakh president, who is expected to win Sunday's election, said the majority of governmental activity in the next nine to two years will be directed toward warding off the effects of the world economic crisis on this country of nearly 16 million people.

"We now are counting on ... actively attracting direct, long-term foreign investment in production and we will actively support local producers," he said.

In recent weeks, Nazarbayev also has announced plans to further the country's privatisation process and introduce private ownership of land.

Myanmar government, NLD lock horns on independence day

YANGON (R) — Myanmar's military government and the opposition held separate rallies Monday to mark the 51st anniversary of the country's independence from British colonial rule, and attacked each other's political agendas.

Premier and Senior General Than Shwe warned in a message to a pro-government rally at People's Square that the opposition National League for Democracy (NLD) party faced the wrath of Myanmar people for attempting to disrupt national objectives.

He was referring to mass rallies organised by semi-government organisations in 19 big cities nationwide in September and October of last year calling for the disbanding of the NLD and deportation of the party's leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

The NLD and the military have been at political loggerheads ever since the military seized power in 1988

and the government refused to recognise the results of a 1990 general election which the party swept.

The ruling State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) has in the past detained thousands of NLD members and later released them to curb the party's political activities.

"We heartily honour the wishes of the masses reverberating from mass meetings expressing the sentiments of the people..." Than Shwe said in his message read out by a senior Yangon military officer to some 13,000 participants at the rally.

Suu Kyi, who has been a thorn in the military's side with her demands for democracy and political freedom, held a low-key but defiant ceremony at the NLD headquarters with top party brass.

The NLD vowed in a statement to press for the convening of a Peoples' Parliament comprising

elected representatives from the 1990 polls.

The party had made the call last year and set up a committee to further its cause. But the SPDC has rejected the NLD's proposal.

"This committee hereby announces its resolution on this occasion that it will continue persevering with courage for the emergence of the People's Parliament and for the prevalence of democracy and human rights in the country," it said.

State-owned media reported Monday that another 421 NLD members in two townships had resigned from their party, bringing to 6,844 the total number of members who had quit since October last year.

The NLD has labelled the numbers issued by the government as false and propaganda aimed at demoralising and intimidating its members.

S. Korea, U.S. to meet ahead of Korean peace talks

SEOUL (AFP) — U.S. and South Korean officials will meet in Washington next week to prepare for the next round of negotiations aimed at forging a permanent peace for the tense Korean peninsula, officials said Monday.

Seoul and Washington officials will hold working-level talks from Jan. 11 to coordinate their positions ahead of the so-called Four-party Peace Talks in Geneva from Jan. 18 to 22.

The foreign ministry's North American Affairs Bureau's director-general, Kwon Jong-Rak, will lead the Seoul team to the talks, while U.S. special envoy for Korean affairs, Charles Kartman, will head Washington's delegation.

Kwon and Kartman will discuss the agenda at the Geneva peace talks — the first since October — which are aimed at replacing the current tense Korean armistice with a permanent peace mechanism.

The United States, South and North Korea and China will take part in the talks, which are expected to focus mainly on procedural issues.

Previous rounds of the talks have stalled over Pyongyang's insistence that withdrawal of 37,000 U.S. troops from the Korean Peninsula be included on the conference agenda, a call Washington has rejected. The 1950-53 Korean war ended with a truce and not a full peace treaty, leaving the two sides still technically at war near half a century later.

The United States and North Korea have agreed tentatively to hold separate bilateral talks ahead of the four-party round. Kartman is chief U.S. negotiator with North Korea as well as chief delegate to the peace talks, while North Korea's Kim Gye-Gwan also represents his country in both fora.

Boy and his sister separated in potential landmark case

BOSTON (AP) — A 4-year-old boy and his 6-year-old sister exchanged stuffed animals and hugs in a tearful farewell that could spark a U.S. Supreme Court ruling on the rights of siblings who are adopted or in foster care.

The boy's lawyers have appealed to the country's highest court to keep the brother and sister together. A ruling in favour of the boy could potentially reunite some 35,000 siblings nationwide.

Saturday, the boy — referred to in court papers as "Hugo L." — said goodbye to his sister, "Gloria L.," in a Department of Social Services office in Boston. He will begin a new life with an aunt in New Jersey while his sister will remain in

Boston's Dorchester section, with the foster family that has adopted her.

"It is the saddest of sad days," Susan Dillard, a court-appointed attorney who fought to keep Hugo with his sister and foster mother, said.

Hugo's aunt picked him up at the office, presenting him with an Ernie doll the boy has come to adore during dozens of visits with the aunt in New Jersey and Boston since March.

At the meeting, relatives of the aunt and the foster mother discussed plans to keep Hugo and Gloria in contact.

"They spent a fair amount of time together, and the families talked about how the children would keep in touch with each other," Dillard said. "I think it really went as

well as anyone could hope for."

The farewell came after a ruling by the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court, which upheld a Juvenile Court decision separating the pair.

Susan Drogan, an attorney for the aunt who now has custody of Hugo, said she expects the boy will get through an initially tough period and come to prosper with his aunt.

"I'm not saying he's going to be happy when he realises his sister and his foster mother are no longer there," she said.

"Of course he will be traumatised. But he will be happy again. His aunt is a wonderful, wonderful lady," Hugo's trip

through the state's child welfare system began just three days after he was born, when he was placed in foster care. He may have been injured by cocaine his mother used while pregnant, according to court papers.

When Hugo turned 2, the state transferred him to the home of his sister's foster mother, "Enid." It was a traumatic move for the boy, but Hugo prospered under Enid's care, began to call Enid "Mommy" and developed a strong bond with Gloria.

Hugo's aunt, however, fought to gain custody. In deciding to hand him over to her, the state's highest court acknowledged that it had made a "heart-wrenching choice."

2 security guards killed, 2 wounded in apartment complex shooting

COMPTON, California (AP) — Two apartment complex security guards were fatally shot and two others were seriously wounded during an early morning firefight at their guard booth.

An assailant attacked early Sunday at the New Wilshire Arms, a low-income housing complex in this community about 30 kilometres south of downtown Los Angeles, said police Lt. Danny Soed. There were no immediate arrests. Police said the sus-

pect was either a frequent visitor or resident of the complex who had possibly argued with guards the previous night.

Two of the guards were able to return fire, said Terry Jones, spokeswoman for the guards' employer, Cleveland-based International Total Services.

Rodriguez Paz, 62, and Remigio Malinao, 49, both of Los Angeles, were each fatally shot in the upper body, Soed said. Saul Connor Martinez, 59, of Los Angeles, was shot behind the ear. He was in serious but stable condition Sunday night at Martin Luther King Jr.-Drew Medical Centre, a nursing supervisor said.

Doctors said he would be brain dead if he survives, according to Martinez's son, Alfredo Connor.

"I never dreamed of coming to a place and seeing my father like this," said Connor. "I didn't even recognise him. Lying there for some miserable-paying job."

The fourth guard, Rodolfo Bombarda, 52, of Carson, suffered wounds to his leg and abdomen. He was in fair condition Sunday night, a nursing supervisor said.

Compton has been plagued by gang- and drug-related violence. But residents of the New Wilshire Arms said they felt safe inside the block-long complex until the shootings. The group of two-story stucco apartments and trim lawns is home to about 600 people.

Scientists discover potential new wonder drug in frogs

SYDNEY (AFP) — Australian tree frogs could hold the key to a new range of drugs to fight cancer and voracious bacteria like golden staph which closes hospital wards, a university research team has discovered.

The team, from the University of Adelaide, has established that the chemical arsenal that protected the frog through millions of years includes some of the most powerful hormones, neuro-peptides, antibiotics and anti-virals yet found in nature.

Using world-class technology, the team, headed by chemistry professor John Bowie, has isolated more than 150 peptides — compounds of amino-acids — while investigating the skin secretions from about 20 of the 200 Australian native frogs.

The Magnificent Tree Frog, or Litoria splendida, produces a neuro-peptide — or amino-acid compounds found in the frog's nervous system — and analgesic 2,000 times more powerful than morphine which it uses as a hormone, analgesic and toxin to deter enemies that might want to eat it.

"The Magnificent Tree Frog is most impressive in that it has huge glands, called

paratoid glands," Bowie told the university's Research Digest, seen here Monday.

"They contain about five or six major peptides which are all hugely active."

When attacked or stressed they secrete the contents of the glands all over their skin, he said.

"One of these compounds is a very powerful antibacterial agent as well as an antiviral agent."

"It is very active against staphylococcus aureus (golden staph) which is one of the most nasty pathogens — the one which quite often closes down wards in hospitals."

Bowie said that preliminary tests conducted in Adelaide in conjunction with the National Cancer Institute in Washington has shown that this peptide is active against a number of human tumours.

Bowie is also collaborating closely with associate professor Mike Tyler on biological and zoological aspects of the research and with Adelaide Hospital Cancer Centre clinical director, Doctor Ian Oliver, to explore the possibilities of using the peptides as anti-cancer drugs.

To create an effective anti-cancer drug they must find a means of delivering the mol-

ecule specifically to the target side in the body to avoid harming normal cells.

The researchers say the compounds found in the frogs help explain the extraordinary survival of the frogs which evolved from fishes some 300 million years then understood the kind of catastrophes or climatic changes which wiped out the dinosaurs.

But while science is only now discovering the potential of the compounds found in frogs, Tyler said frogs are for the first time in world-wide decline.

Their numbers are plummeting in 140 countries around the world for no simple reason, although water pollution is believed to be a likely cause.

"We are seeing a tragic decline of frog populations world wide and if we can't stop it, humans will miss out on this wonderful pharmaceutical factory," said Tyler, who is the Australian representative of an international campaign to save the frog. "Frogs have an enormous array of natural products and we've really only scratched the surface of understanding what they are and what they do."

The secretions are removed without harming the frogs.

The race is on for the first baby of 2000

A British television company is offering stardom for the first baby of the next millennium

By Peter Kingston

OF ALL days to have a birthday, can there be any worse than New Year's Day? Ponder it for a moment. Most people around you are feeling wretched and hungover to boot. Every one's fed up with celebrations, their systems addled with stale Yule. And the proximity of Christmas means you never get the presents you are due.

"As a child it was so embarrassing," recalls Trevor Grove, former editor of the Sunday Telegraph, who was born on the first day of 1945. "As soon as people started singing Auld Lang Syne, my mum would shout: 'Hey, remember everybody, it's Trevor's birthday!'"

But worse, in anniversary terms, would be to pop out on the first day of the new millennium, while much of the Western world, including every consultant obstetrician on the planet, are getting blasted.

The rule about never giving birth at weekends, or on major public holidays because the senior medics have left the ship to a skeleton junior crew, will apply to the power of 10. Yet despite all these drawbacks, you can be quite sure that next March, many couples will be at it like knives or rabbits in the hope of conceiving a millennium baby. There is expected to be a 1.5 per cent increase in the birth-rate in the year 2000. And those to whom it won't occur to choose this folly will get a thudding gudge from ITV. For an incentive is being offered, one that catches the essence of these celebrity-obsessed times — stardom. Stardom for life, at that. Though it might be rather like spending your life as Jim Carrey in this year's creepy movie about a man born only to be viewed by others, *The Truman Show*.

Yorkshire Television is planning a series called *Birthrace 2000* about babies born on January 1, 2000. The aim, says John Whiston, the station's programme director, is to follow couples through pregnancy, through delivery and beyond, perhaps turning up every few

years, along the lines of *Seven Up*.

In order to get 10 likely couples, Yorkshire TV will run an advertising campaign urging couples to prepare for congress on the night which medical science calculates will be the most likely, if conception is achieved, to lob out a January 1 baby.

There is some disagreement about which will actually be the best night, dubbed the Great British Bonk by Whiston. The initial plan, having taken advice from the National Childbirth Trust, was to pitch it on March 17, an evening which may have excluded many with Irish credentials, who would be distracted by St. Patrick's memory. But that date may be moved back to between March 25 and April 9. On that evening, Yorkshire TV plans programmes to put viewers in the mood. There will probably be suggestive clips from old comedies, maybe footage of various fornicating fauna and other squiddy stuff.

That period would be the window of opportunity (if that's quite the phrase we want), if the target is January 1, says Professor James Drife,

professor of obstetrics and gynaecology at Leeds General Infirmary. But even if the correct date is picked for a conception attempt, there is still only a 4 per cent chance of birth happening on the "due date" if nature is allowed to follow its course, he says. "The odds are heavily stacked against success."

There are so many imponderables and variables. The two main ones are the odds on conception and then on punctual arrival. "At best the chance of conceiving on a certain cycle if both partners are fine is 1-in-3." The due date is calculated in two ways: 280 days from the start of a woman's period, which for January 1 would be March 25, or 266 days after conception. But the due date is only a rough guide. It is quite usual for birth to come within two weeks either side. And crunching these figures up, you get the 1-in-25 odds.

haby in terms of safety is in the middle of a public holiday, particularly in the middle of the night," says Professor Drife. "A request for a Caesarian for one minute after midnight would be very ill-advised — medical caution would be against it."

There are exceptions. Some women who have difficult pregnancies, or have had bad ones in the past, are often given a fixed date for Caesarian births well ahead. Now if that day just happened to be January 1: well... they might be in luck.

In the private sector, however, the rules are looser about "elective" Caesarians. "Career women might successfully elect to have Caesarians because they want to go back to work soon," says Dr. Simon Fishel, an infertility specialist. But even in the private sector, an ambition to whip out the first baby of the third millennium out on deadline would be unlikely to find favour. And even if it did, the cost of assembling the necessary team of surgeon, an aesthetist and the rest of the team during the last hour of 1999 would be prohibitive. Will anybody pay that much for a vanity birth?

Dr. Fishel said that couples wanting medical intervention at conception to boost the chances of a January 1 baby would again be unlikely to find help in the private sector. "We have couples asking for a winter baby because of each partner's work schedules. We basically say: on your bikes." But there are exceptions, says Dr. Fishel. For instance, an international opera star with a tight timetable who was in England for just a month was allowed to have fertility treatment.

There are the folkloric means of bringing on labour when the due date has come or passed: a hot curry or hotter lovemaking. And on New Year's Eve there is a further possibility. "I reckon I started to move downwards during Auld Lang Syne," says Trevor Grove. "It was all that kicking about my mother was doing."

— The Guardian



The incentive is stardom, a TV series about the babies born on January 1, 2000, though it might be rather like spending your life as Jim Carrey in this year's creepy movie about a man born only to be viewed by others, *The Truman Show* (file photo)

Set a thief to catch a thief

When Trinidad & Tobago found itself saddled with a pest problem it had never encountered before, the old, chemical methods seemed to do no good, so they turned to the use of insects to defeat the invading pest.

By Darryl Dean

GARDENERS IN Trinidad began noticing the danger signs about three years ago: Deformed fruits and flowers on trees and insects overrunning plants, their leaves curled and punched together in rosette-like fashion.

The invading bugs, wrapped in their white cotton-like shrouds, spread at an alarming rate through various parts of the country.

The pest — identified as the hibiscus mealybug or *maconellicoccus hirsutus* (green) — posed a growing threat to food crops, ornamental plants and forests. It also disrupted inter-island trade in the region.

If the bug had managed to spread and get out of control in the Caribbean, officials say it would have had a tremendous impact on the price of fruit and vegetables.

But today, the hibiscus mealybug is reported to be under control in Trinidad and Tobago, and the government's handling of the problem is widely regarded as an environmental success story.

"So successful has it been that the scientific community in the region has taken an interest in our management strategy," said Cynthia Persad, coordinator of the pest control programme run by the ministry of agriculture here.

Agriculture Minister Reeza Moohamed cites studies that showed that the agricultural sector would have suffered losses amounting to TTS700 million over a period of about three years had the government of Trinidad and Tobago not taken the necessary action to deal with the pest.

where the pest caused widespread damage.

"We have had a vibrant trade with our Caribbean Community neighbours, including Grenada which had been sending us regular shipments of fresh fruits and vegetables," Dr. Moe said.

But the discovery of the mealybug in Grenada and Trinidad and Tobago had a considerable impact. In 1995, several Caribbean countries suspended the importation of agricultural products from Trinidad and Tobago and Grenada.

Plant protection regulations were amended here to require import permits for all fruits and vegetables and planting materials.

In September 1995, agriculture ministers of the Caribbean and the

The predatory beetles feed on the bugs at all stages of their development, while the parasitic wasps puncture the adult bugs and feed on the oozing body fluids

Americas declared the hibiscus mealybug a new pest in the Western Hemisphere and a regional action plan was set up with the long-term goal of achieving sustainable control of the pest.

"As long as the insect is present in one country in the region, every other country is at risk," said an official in the Ministry of Agriculture in Port of Spain.

Among the projects included in the action plan were developing a regional capability for identifying the pest and its natural enemies, the upgrading of plant quarantine facilities and the mounting of information and public awareness programmes.

Trinidad began its action plan with a public awareness campaign to inform citizens about the newly-discovered bugs. It also intensified plant quarantine measures and a introduced a pest control programme.

At first, Trinidad tried the more traditional method of pest control:

Slashing and burning the affected plants and spraying infested areas with chemicals. But this proved ineffective. No chemical pesticide could penetrate the waxy covering with which the insects protect themselves.

"We realised that we had to introduce measures which would destroy the bugs but not harm the environment," said Persad. "So an integrated pest management control programme was launched."

The major focus of this programme was the use of biological control agents, Persad said, noting that this was considered "the best long-term option."

She explained that the type of mealybug discovered in Trinidad and Tobago and other Caribbean countries is commonly found in tropical Africa, South-East Asia and North-east Australia.

Researchers went looking for the pest's natural enemies — other insects which would destroy the hibiscus mealybug. They found three: The Indian and Australian beetles and Asian wasps.

The predatory beetles feed on the bugs at all stages of their development, while the parasitic wasps puncture the adult bugs and feed on the oozing body fluids. The female wasps also lay their eggs inside the bugs, preventing them from developing further.

Researchers studied, reared and multiplied the beetles and wasps before releasing them at several sites with heavy mealybug infestations.

"The release were highly successful. The beetles and wasps immediately went on the rampage, attacking the bugs," Persad said.

As part of the ministry of agriculture's plan to make the bio-pesticides more accessible to farmers, several centres to produce the beetles and wasps, were set up in different parts of the country.

Huge samaan trees became ideal locations for the multiplication of the beetles.

"These magnificent trees, forty or fifty years old, with canopies extending a quarter of an acre or half an acre, were susceptible to the hibiscus mealybug," Persad said.

"We did lose some samaan trees during the early stages of the mealybug attack but what was remarkable about the predator beetles was that they found the samaan trees to be excellent places" for producing more beetles.

"And we were able to collect the larvae from the beetles at those locations and move them to other sites where they were needed"



The picturesque island of St. Helena is facing an ecological disaster (file photo)

St. Helena ecology is world's most endangered

By Brendan Boyle

THE TINY South Atlantic island of St. Helena is pinning its hopes for economic growth on ecological tourism, but its plants are ranked the most endangered in the world.

The World Conservation Union said in a report last April that 40 per cent — about four times the global average — of St. Helena's plants were threatened with extinction.

On the little volcanic island that juts from the sea some 1,200 miles west of Angola, government conservation chief Rebecca Cairns-Wicks said the real figure was far higher.

Interviewed in her one-roomed workspace behind the museum in the island capital of Jamestown, she said St. Helena had slightly more than 60 indigenous plants of which 45 occurred only on the 108-sq. km island, which measures just 16.09 km across.

"I don't think many people realise just how close to extinction many species still are. Of the 45 (endemics) there's only literally five that are not within the red list," she said.

St. Helena, a lonely volcanic peak brushed by the constant south-east tradewinds, was discovered by Portuguese explorers in 1502 and used as a watering place.

They kept its existence a secret, putting goats ashore to breed for meat, but making no effort to settle the island.

Britain claimed and settled the island in 1513 and for centuries, St. Helena served as a watering place for ships, as a telegraph relay station, as

Napoleon's final place of exile and as a prison camp for Boers captured in South Africa.

It was the goats that did the most to wreck the pristine ecology of the island, leaving the slopes of the Jamestown valley that flanks the small capital bare and red.

Inland, however, thickly wooded misty slopes and narrow, winding lanes present an entirely different aspect.

Flax, which was the island's chief export until the British post office switched in the 1960s from sisal string to synthetic nylon, still lines many roads.

"What St. Helena has experienced is that when man comes along with associated animals and plants, species that were found then very, very quickly disappeared," Cairns-Wicks said.

"We have very rare flora, where species have been reduced to one or two individuals." With a shoestring budget and the dedication of islanders committed to undoing the damage wrought by goats, donkeys and alien plants, conservationists are slowly reversing the decline.

"Maybe, one day many, many years from here, we'll have habitats that perhaps resemble what once was here, but at the moment we have a very disturbed habitat," she said.

British Governor David Smallman, who says tourism is the island's best hope of breaking its financial dependence on handouts from London, said the conservation programme was showing real successes.

St. Helena, with a population of fewer than 6,000, generates about \$9.95 million from fishing, postage stamps, a little of the world's most expensive coffee and a tiny tourism industry.

Britain injects a further 8.5 million pounds in funding, services and infrastructure, including the passenger cargo ship RMS. St. Helena, which is the only means of reaching the island.

"For the size of government and the financial resources we have, probably a lot is being done (for conservation)," Smallman said in an interview in the waterfront castle built after Britain settled the island.

He said some plants had been brought back from the brink of extinction and within the past month, conservationists had found a single example of a boxwood plant thought to have died out decades ago.

In an area known simply as Scotland, Vanessa Thomas is coaxing life back into species that have been reduced to single trees and shrubs, nurturing cuttings, coddling seedlings and pollinating young plants in special seed orchards.

Where it has been possible to grow from the last survivors, plants have been returned to the wild and Thomas and her team make sure they are able to breed.

"We do hand pollination because it's too far for the bees to travel. You've got one in Scotland and one in Mount Pleasant and a couple up High Peak."

"The bees can't get to those areas because of the distance, so we have to hand pollinate."

she said.

The island has a small grant from the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF) and a bit more from other conservation agencies, but as a British dependency, it has been denied the status and aid flow of a developing country.

Jasper Steele, St. Helena's chief agricultural and natural resources officer, sees the ecology as the key to financial independence.

"St. Helena has the image of an island that is unspoiled, but in fact it has been fairly thoroughly spoiled over the years by the devastation of the goats and donkeys and cats and so on," he said.

Though the island is not unspoiled, it is unpolluted and Steele believes there is a business to be made out of that.

"What I am trying to do is to establish our department as an organic certification body under the auspices of the Soil Association of the United Kingdom."

"We'd be in a position eventually to certify products from the island as being organic with the Soil Association logo." Steele believes the growing global market for products grown and made without chemicals and fertilisers is one that St. Helena could crack.

"I think this is very important because this is where the niche lies — in this purity market," he said.

Right now, the island's most pressing needs are for investors to set up that business and for funding to save the plants that help to make the island unique.

Smiles all round as euro makes solid start

LONDON (R) — The euro got off to a strong start on Monday as politicians and investors hailed the historic launch of a single currency for nearly 300 million Europeans as ushering in a new era of economic integration.

The euro fell back from its early highs above \$1.19 to trade around \$1.1790 at 1430 GMT, still well above the \$1.16875 level at which its precursor, the European Currency Unit, ended its life on Thursday.

Stock and bond markets across Europe toasted the arrival of economic and monetary union (EMU), rising sharply on expectations that the euro will boost prosperity and grow to challenge the global dominance of the dollar.

European Commission President Jacques Santer said he was very satisfied with the euro's smooth debut, which caps 40 years of ever-closer economic cooperation aimed at securing peace and security on a continent that spawned the century's two world wars.

"A new era has started," Santer told Reuters Television. German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder added: "I know the importance of this currency. I know that it will make Europe move forward."

The actual start of euro trading, after months of painstaking preparations in dealing rooms around the globe, was something of a non-event.

"The birth of the new currency has gone well — it does not need an incubator and it is well, alive and kicking," said David Bloom, currency strategist at HSBC Markets.

Banks and brokerages reported few if any technical glitches but experts cautioned that it would be a few days before they could be sure that the proceeds of the first day's euro trades had been properly processed.

"Before we declare this a complete triumph, let's just wait till the settlement is done of the first few trades," Graham Bishop of Salomon Smith Barney in London said.

The 11 countries that adopted the euro on Jan. 1 — Austria, Belgium, Fin-

land, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal and Spain — have about the same economic output and share of world trade as the United States.

This weight is likely to give the euro a firm underpinning, especially as international investors and central banks switch some of their holdings out of the dollar, economists say.

"The euro will start to challenge the dollar as the world's lead currency as soon as the European Central Bank and the new currency establish their credibility — which will probably be quite soon," U.S. economist Fred Bergsten wrote in the International Herald Tribune.

"The portfolio shifts I

expect now that the euro is there, is credible, by international investors in particular will push the euro higher rather than lower," added Norbert Walter, chief economist at Deutsche Bank in Frankfurt.

Investors, now looking at a huge seamless single market for bonds and equities cemented by the euro, reacted enthusiastically to the euro's debut.

Shares in Germany, France, Italy and Spain all rose by more than 3.5 per cent. Only Britain, which is standing aloof from the single currency, failed to join the party.

Leading shares in London were down 0.26 per cent, but a government minister predicted that

popular opinion could swing in favour of the single currency if Britons see that it makes goods cheaper and travel easier.

"The creeping euro has been a phrase that people have used. I think it's very possible that it will become the galloping euro because people will see the value in having a single currency," junior trade minister Lord David Simon said.

National Australia Bank in Sydney, the first foreign exchange centre to reopen after the New Year's break, claimed the honours for the first official trade in euros.

The bank said it bought the currency on behalf of John Fairfax Holdings, an Australian publishing group.

The partners in the euro and the ECB, which will set a single interest rate for all 11 countries, were bullish about the currency's prospects.

"The euro is a serious, solid, stable currency," said of French governor Jean-Claude Trichet said. "It had a good welcome."

But some sounded a note of caution amid the euphoria.

"Whether or not EMU is

a success in the sense of bringing down European unemployment in a context of low inflation, growth and so forth remains to be seen. But on the technicalities so far, fingers crossed, everything's smooth," said Alison Cottrell of PaineWebber in London.

Things were not smooth, though, for Dutch Finance Minister Gerrit Zalm. He was hit by two cakes thrown by anti-euro protesters when he arrived to mark the start of trading in the single currency at the Amsterdam bourse.

Asian central banks seen adding euro to reserves

TOKYO (R) — Major holders of external reserves such as Taiwan and China, as well as other Asian central banks, are expected to diversify their reserves to include the euro while trimming U.S. dollar holdings, analysts say.

As holders of about 40 per cent of the world's reserves, Asian central banks have looked forward to the birth of the euro since regional currencies pegged to the U.S. dollar were hurt more than others during the region's financial crisis, they said.

"Major reserves holders as well as other Asian nations seem to have realised the danger of holding too many dollars so they should be eager to diversify their reserves. The euro launch comes at the right time as they are looking for alternatives," said Yoshio Maki, research associate at Fuji Research Institute.

"Many nations in Asia must be considering using the euro as their potential key reserve currency," Maki added.

Some Asian nations have already expressed an interest in holding euros. In December, an official at China's central bank reportedly said it will gradually increase the proportion of euros in its foreign reserves, the world's second-largest.

"The People's Bank of China plans to adjust the mix of China's foreign reserves, appropriately reducing holdings in the U.S. dollar and increasing holdings in the euro," the official International Finance News newspaper said, quoting Wang Yu, an official with the central bank's research bureau.

About 19 per cent of China's external reserves are made up of European currencies, with the dollar accounting for 62 per cent and the yen about eight per cent. As of the end of October, China's reserves stood at \$143.7 billion.

Analysts said the ratio of euros in China's reserves was expected to rise to about 30 to 40 per cent after its launch.

Last July, Taiwan's Uni-

ed Daily News newspaper said Taiwan planned to hold 10 billion euro as part of its external reserves.

Taiwan reported its foreign exchange reserves stood at \$88.074 billion at the end of November.

German Bundesbank President Hans Tietmeyer said in Tokyo in July that the euro had potential to surpass the current status of the mark as an official reserve currency in Asian central banks.

After meeting leaders of Asian central banks, Tietmeyer said the banks would likely monitor the euro carefully to see if it could maintain a stable and credible status over the long term.

The International Monetary Fund said the mark accounted for about 12.8 per cent of international foreign reserves and the dollar 57.1 per cent in 1997.

Analysts said the timing of a shift into the euro would depend on the performance of the dollar in the near future and on economic trends in Europe and the United States.

Fumiyuki Sasaki, an economist at Nomura Research Institute, said: "It's simple. Central banks are focusing on the euro because the dollar and the yen have not been stable in recent years. If they were stable, the banks would not consider diversifying their reserves to include the

euro." "Holding the dollar heavily in their reserves is very risky now. We can see this just by looking at the behaviour of the dollar in recent months," Sasaki added.

Analysts are also sceptical about the dollar's position as the key currency while the United States remains the largest debtor nation and holder of the world's biggest trade deficit.

"There are safe-haven needs to hold the dollar, such as for security purposes, but the dollar's position as the leading key currency could be shaken if the value of the dollar starts depreciating rapidly again," said Atsushi Niigata, a researcher at Fuji Research.

"That could be the time when Asian central banks start shifting their reserves into the euro," Niigata said.

Some analysts said the shift in reserves would happen gradually and euro reserves might not rise dramatically in the short-term, given the underlying trade structure in Asia, where the United States remains a major trading partner.

Japan's finance ministry has been tight-lipped about disclosing details of its external reserves, but a senior ministry official said there is a possibility that the world's largest reserve holders, including Japan, could switch part of their dollar reserves into euros.

"But we will not be doing so in an abrupt manner. We will wait until liquidity in the euro and smooth convertibility into other currencies are secured," the official said.

Japan would like to see how euro zone nations deal with having their monetary and foreign exchange policy management bound together and how they address the impact of a possible cyclical economic downturn, he said.

It has also stepped up efforts to globalise the yen to prevent it from lagging behind after the launch of the euro.

In mid-December, the ministry announced measures including the exemption of withholding tax payments by non-residents on interest income earned from Japanese government bonds.

Another senior Finance Ministry official said central banks may boost their use of yen in reserves following the measures.

Some analysts also said the introduction of the euro was not expected to hurt the yen's position as a reserve currency.

"As many Asian countries are aiming to diversify their reserves, I don't expect they will cut back reserves in yen, as global reserves holdings in yen only amount to about five per cent of the total," a Japanese research institute official said.

Exchange Rates Monday, 04-01-99 ACCESS 4446868											
CURRENCY	JORDAN DINAR	US DOLLAR	EURO	SWISS FRANC	DEM MARK	FRANCE FR.	GERMANY	ITALY	NETHERLANDS	SPAIN	UNITED KINGDOM
JORDAN DINAR	1.0000	0.1887	0.1928	1.8780	1.8368	0.1844	2.3505	0.2077	0.7080		
BAHRAIN RIAL	5.2994	1.0000	1.0215	9.9523	9.7452	1.0303	12.4558	1.0007	3.7520		
KUWAIT DINEER	5.1879	0.9789	1.0000	9.7427	9.5400	1.0087	12.1946	1.0775	3.6730		
QATAR RIAL	0.5325	0.1005	0.1028	1.0000	0.9792	1.0335	1.2517	1.1108	0.3770		
OMAN RIAL	0.5436	0.1026	0.1048	1.0212	1.0000	1.0307	1.2783	1.1129	0.3850		
QATAR RIAL	5.1434	0.9705	0.9914	9.6592	9.4582	1.0000	12.0800	1.0883	3.6415		
KUWAIT DINEER	0.4254	0.0803	0.0820	0.7988	0.7823	0.0827	1.0000	0.0854	0.3012		
ROYAL DINEER	4.8145	0.9085	0.9290	9.0418	8.8535	0.9361	11.3171	1.0000	3.4087		
LEBANON LIRA	21.4551	0.0538	0.0558	40.3448	39.5025	4.1769	50.4880	4.4621	15.2100		
US DOLLAR	1.4124	0.2695	0.2723	2.6526	2.5973	0.2746	3.3201	0.2834	1.0000		
EURO	0.8511	0.1606	0.1641	1.5984	1.5651	0.1655	2.0006	0.1769	0.6026		
DEM MARK	2.3573	0.4448	0.4544	4.4271	4.3250	0.4583	5.5412	0.4896	1.6930		
FRANCE FR.	1.8322	0.3846	0.3724	3.6286	3.5332	0.3757	4.6415	0.4013	1.4548		
GERMANY	7.9089	1.4924	1.5245	14.8538	14.5438	1.5377	18.5906	1.6427	5.5995		
NETHERLANDS	1.8095	0.3637	0.3702	3.0225	2.9597	0.3129	3.7832	0.3343	1.1385		
ITALY	2.8571	0.5014	0.5122	4.8959	4.8861	0.5166	6.2487	0.5519	1.8812		
SPAIN	11.3213	2.1363	2.1823	21.2613	20.8189	2.2012	26.5119	2.3515	8.0105		
UNITED KINGDOM	23.3192	4.4003	4.4950	43.7931	42.8820	4.5338	54.8141	4.8455	16.5100		
RUSSIAN RUBLE	48.9082	8.2289	8.4274	81.8483	80.3379	8.9080	114.9835	10.1584	34.5070		
AUSTRALIAN DOLLAR	2.3855	0.4313	0.4405	4.2921	4.2078	0.4444	5.3723	0.4747	1.6181		
NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	3.9138	0.7305	0.7544	7.3501	7.1972	0.7410	9.1959	0.8126	2.7710		
CYPRUS POUND	2.6836	0.5094	0.5173	5.0388	4.9439	0.5216	6.3081	0.5574	1.9000		
AUSTRIAN SCHILLING	16.6780	3.1471	3.2148	31.3210	30.6893	3.2426	39.2032	3.4841	11.8080		
CANADIAN DOLLAR	2.1884	0.4092	0.4180	4.0721	3.9874	0.4216	5.0988	0.4504	1.5332		
FINNISH MARKKA	1.2084	0.2282	0.2331	2.2712	2.2238	0.2351	2.9428	0.2512	0.8500		

MAJOR CURRENCIES AGAINST JORDAN DINAR CENTRAL BANK BULLETIN											
CURRENCY	1 M	3 M	6 M	1 YEAR	5 YEAR	10 YEAR	15 YEAR	20 YEAR	25 YEAR	30 YEAR	35 YEAR
US DOLLAR	0.1887	0.1928	0.1950	0.1975	0.2000	0.2025	0.2050	0.2075	0.2100	0.2125	0.2150
EURO	0.1606	0.1641	0.1665	0.1690	0.1715	0.1740	0.1765	0.1790	0.1815	0.1840	0.1865
DEM MARK	2.3573	2.3855	2.4137	2.4419	2.4701	2.4983	2.5265	2.5547	2.5829	2.6111	2.6393
FRANCE FR.	1.8322	1.8594	1.8866	1.9138	1.9410	1.9682	1.9954	2.0226	2.0498	2.0770	2.1042
GERMANY	7.9089	7.9361	7.9633	7.9905	8.0177	8.0449	8.0721	8.0993	8.1265	8.1537	8.1809
NETHERLANDS	1.8095	1.8367	1.8639	1.8911	1.9183	1.9455	1.9727	1.9999	2.0271	2.0543	2.0815
ITALY	2.8571	2.8843	2.9115	2.9387	2.9659	2.9931	3.0203	3.0475	3.0747	3.1019	3.1291
SPAIN	11.3213	11.3485	11.3757	11.4029	11.4301	11.4573	11.4845	11.5117	11.5389	11.5661	11.5933
UNITED KINGDOM	23.3192	23.3464	23.3736	23.4008	23.4280	23.4552	23.4824	23.5096	23.5368	23.5640	23.5912
RUSSIAN RUBLE	48.9082	48.9354	48.9626	48.9898	49.0170	49.0442	49.0714	49.0986	49.1258	49.1530	49.1802
AUSTRALIAN DOLLAR	2.3855	2.3855	2.3855	2.3855	2.3855	2.3855	2.3855	2.3855	2.3855	2.3855	2.3855
NEW ZEALAND DOLLAR	3.9138	3.9138	3.9138	3.9138	3.9138	3.9138	3.9138	3.9138	3.9138	3.9138	3.9138
CYPRUS POUND	2.6836	2.6836	2.6836	2.6836	2.6836	2.6836	2.6836	2.6836	2.6836	2.6836	2.6836
AUSTRIAN SCHILLING	16.6780	16.6780	16.6780	16.6780	16.6780	16.6780	16.6780	16.6780	16.6780	16.6780	16.6780
CANADIAN DOLLAR	2.1884	2.1884	2.1884	2.1884	2.1884	2.1884	2.1884	2.1884	2.1884	2.1884	2.1884
FINNISH MARKKA	1.2084	1.2084	1.2084	1.2084	1.2084	1.2084	1.2084	1.2084	1.2084	1.2084	1.2084

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THE Daily Crossword Edited by Wayne Robert Williams

TMSPuzzles@aol.com

ACROSS

- 1 Witticism
- 5 Marshall's men
- 10 Ground
- 14 Kuwaiti leader
- 15 Of bees
- 18 Tortoise's rival
- 17 Sicilian resort town
- 18 Presley-Young movie
- 20 Footballs
- 22 One of the Gorgons
- 23 Use a thumble
- 24 Church bench
- 25 Talking bird
- 27 Trustworthy
- 32 Compass pt.
- 33 Recorded
- 35 Eliot's Manner
- 36 Production of goods subj.
- 38 Twangy
- 40 Mixed breed pooch
- 41 Membrane of grasses
- 43 Celebratory events
- 45 Somme summer
- 46 Presley-Bixby movie
- 48 Use a blackjack
- 50 Humankind
- 51 Buddhist shrine
- 52 French port
- 56 Rascal
- 59 Presley-Stanwyck movie
- 61 Hindu music form
- 62 Blyth and Jillian
- 63 Ice-cream cake
- 64 Ukraine capital
- 65 Dog breed
- 66 Brainstorm
- 67 Faction

DOWN

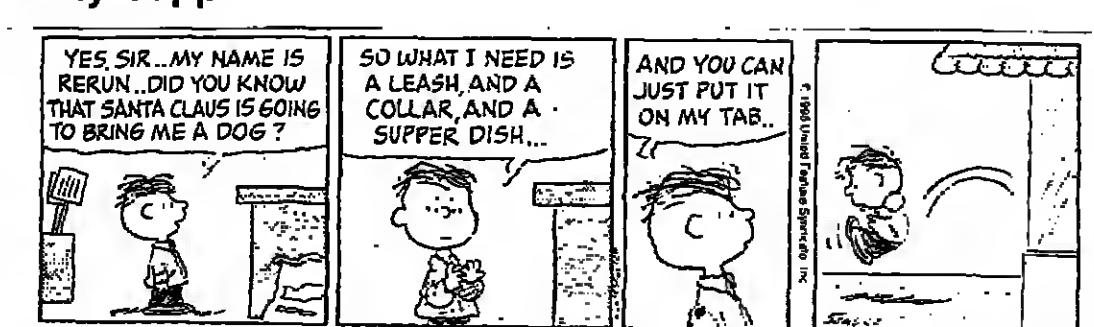
- 1 Military vehicle
- 2 Present starter?
- 3 Presley-Matthau movie
- 4 Graphite
- 5 Neighbor of Iran
- 7 Speculate
- 8 Caesar and
- 9 Victorious
- 10 Glossy paint
- 11 Roe source
- 11 Honolulu's island
- 12 Gershwin and
- 13 Spartan queen
- 19 and Clark
- 21 Rope tie
- 24 Pump a bike
- 25 Chick calls
- 26 Songwriters' grp.
- 27 Repeat oneself
- 28 Draw a bead
- 29 Presley-Lansbury movie
- 30 Alternative to cappuccino
- 31 Former senator
- 34 Heethen
- 37 Born in Bordeaux
- 39 Secretes milk
- 42 Allow in
- 44 Spirit
- 47 Japanese horseradish
- 49 Fire starters
- 51 Diving gear
- 52 Grouch
- 53 First-class
- 54 Moon goddess
- 55 Off, underling
- 56 Vague amount
- 57 Elderly
- 58 Donated
- 60 Physical build, casually

ELLIS GALL INTL
LEONA OMOO TARA
EOICT TENS CROP
CASHINONESCHIPS
NAN ELYBEE
EL PASO CASE
TALL MARK ADIOS
THE PRICE IS RIGHT
ERASE ETNA OONA
IMPUTE KEN
OOLLARS ANOCENTS
ERIN KILO ADIEU
ASEA UNIT GENRE
LESS PETS ENEMY

Peanuts



Andy Capp



Mutt'n'Jeff



THE BETTER HALF. By Glasbergen



JUMBLE

THAT SCRAMBLED WORD GAME by Henri Arnold and Mike Anglin

Unscramble these four Jumbles, one letter to each square, to form four ordinary words.

ONSOW
LUGYL
SURJIT
AUSANE

Answer: FOR " " " " " "

Yesterday's Jumbles: BELIE BLOOD VOLUME FONDLY
Answer: Often seen at a botanic garden - LOVE IN BLOOM

Daily Beat

A review of news from the Arabic Press

Banker sees difficulties in improving living standard if high population growth continues

IF POPULATION growth continues at the same rates witnessed during the past 30 years, it would be very difficult to expect a noticeable improvement in the living standard, a senior Jordanian banker said in a lecture recently. He stressed the importance of overcoming the imbalance between the high rate of population growth and the inability to increase the resources in a way and by a volume that would maintain equilibrium in the relationship or improve it in the service of the people.

Wasef Azar, general manager of the Jordan National Bank, said the Jordanian society did not give enough attention to the imbalance between the resources and the population. He proposed remedying the imbalance through controlling the annual population growth and reducing it to the lowest possible level on the one hand and, on the other hand, seeking to boost the available resources so as the share per capita would be much more than what it is now.

The senior banker said there has been improvement recently in legislative development but, he added, "It still lacks a more comprehensive interaction with the private sector in all aspects and its implementation is slow." Azar indicated that if many legislations, including economic ones, were completed they still have not matched the developments in terms of opening up to the outside world as new dimensions with direct economic effects were taking place.

"If Jordan is unable to stay away from its internal requirements to open its market, it must therefore move fast to develop legislations in order to place the productive sectors on the same footing with foreign competitors or to neutralise the advantage

they enjoy and are not available to the Jordanian producer.

The most important legislation needing updating is the customs law or the regulations for its implementation, Azar said. In addition, he mentioned the importance of expediting the issuance of a law to protect local production. Such a law would provide the necessary measures to counter dumping policies and price undercutting.

"There could also be a need to bring in legislations for encouraging competition and banning monopoly and protecting intellectual property rights," the senior banker said noting that both legislations would be important for foreign producers and damaging for the Jordanian market. "Should there be no way except to issue such legislations, it would be appropriate if the public sector would ease their effects on Jordanian producers and consumers.

The last area mentioned by the lecturer was the administrative development which he described as below the acceptable level despite the overwhelming desire of the political leadership and the consecutive governments for improvements and for minimising routine which stands as the major barrier facing investors, producers and exporters.

"The civil servant is still not directed or trained in many institutions to provide the good service at the lowest cost and in the quickest time," Azar said adding: "Many civil servants do not realise the amount of loss for the country as a result of the administrative complexities which may not be the fault of the employee as much as the efficiency of regulations which have not been reconsidered and revised." IAI (Dustour)

Europhoria grips European markets

LONDON (AFP) — The euro immediately staked its claim as a world-leading currency Monday in a successful first day of trading in London, with euphoria spreading to Europe's stock markets.

Challenging the dollar and yen as the dominant tender, the 11-nation currency sustained its firm worldwide debut overnight in Asia, dipping on profit-taking before rising back above the \$1.18 level.

"In all likelihood, it'll become the second largest traded currency, but it's far too soon to say so," said Paul Meggyesi, senior currency economist at Deutsche Bank.

Chief European economist at ING Barings in London, Mark Cliffe, said the first day of the euro's life had "gone remarkably smoothly," although "people are trading very warily."

Late Monday in London, the world's leading foreign exchange market, the new currency traded at \$1.1870, up from \$1.1795 at midday and \$1.1810 on opening. It was being traded at 133.07 yen, compared to 134.28 yen earlier and 134.57 yen in Tokyo.

On Thursday the last reference rate for the ECU, which was transformed into the euro, was \$1.16675 and 132.800 yen.

The European Central Bank (ECB), the guardian of the euro, late Monday issued its first euro reference rates as one euro equalling \$1.1789, 133.73 yen, 0.711 pounds and 1.6168 Swiss francs.

An economist with the Bank of America in London, Robert Hayward, said that the euro might rise as high as \$1.22 in the next few days.

Stock markets in continental Europe bounded into the stratosphere in reaction, with Frankfurt's DAX closing 5.67 per cent higher, the Paris CAC-40 5.20 per cent higher, Madrid's Ibex-35 6.21 per cent higher, and Milan's Mib 30 6.39 per cent higher.

However, because the strength of the euro would make European exports more expensive, the upward drive was expected to make the equity boom short-lived, analysts said.

London, which is outside the euro zone, closed 0.05 per cent lower on a bearish outlook for the British economy this year.

The euro, which is joined by all EU members except Britain, Denmark, Greece and Sweden, was broadly hailed as a new super currency.

In Japan, Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi was quoted as saying by Jiji Press that the yen was far behind in the new "triangle system," saying that "the yen maintains only a five per cent share" of the world market.

However, U.S. Deputy Treasury Secretary Lawrence Summers said that he did not expect the dollar to be pushed off its perch as the world's preferred reserve currency.

"I don't see a reason why the euro should be a threat... as long as we can keep our own emphasis on our fundamentals," he said.

Asked if a possible erosion in the dollar's status as the world's reserve currency could prompt higher U.S. interest rates to shore up the greenback, Summers said: "As far as the dollar is concerned now, the buck stops here."

"As long as we keep our fundamentals strong, I think the dollar and U.S. borrowing costs will be just fine," he added.

Britain is deeply divided over whether or not to join the euro zone and Prime Minister Tony Blair reiterated his pledge to hold a referendum when he considered the economic conditions to be right.

However, London is expected to be able to maintain its role as Europe's dominant financial centre, analysts said.

Foreign exchange analysts in London expressed relief that the weekend's hectic preparations for the market launch of the euro had gone well, but said that volumes were cautiously low.

London's banks and brokerages had just over three days from Thursday to convert their trading systems and accounts from the 11 participating national currencies into euros in time for Monday morning.

"The biggest fear was a crash of systems and there hasn't been one," the global head of treasury research at ABN Amro, Tony Norfield, said.

"It's hard to judge a much more definite direction with the small amount of trading going on," he said. "The market is taking it easy for the first day of trading and is waiting to see if all the computers and systems work."

In Frankfurt, the ECB dismissed as "rumours" reports that it had intervened earlier in Asia to prevent the euro rising too strongly against the dollar.

"These are rumours and we do not comment on rumours," ECB spokesman Manfred Koerber said.

Meanwhile, the pound weakened to 1.4089 euro to the pound from an estimated 1.4139 when euro conversion rates were set on Thursday, and was likely to continue to fall to about 1.40 euros, analysts said.

Nick Pursons, at Paribas, said "the British pound and the Swiss franc are going to be more and more marginalised."

The British currency is also under pressure ahead of a Bank of England monetary policy meeting on Wednesday and Thursday.

Bank of England Governor Eddie George said Monday that British interest rates — at 6.25 per cent, compared to three per cent in the euro zone — could continue to fall if inflation remains low.

Meanwhile, U.S. traders reacted cautiously to the euro in early trading here Monday, waiting to see which way the market would take the new currency once the euphoria surrounding its launch declined.

"It's replaced the mark as the main European currency, so there is of course a lot of portfolio reallocation in euros," said Henry Willmore, senior economist at Barclays Capital. "But we saw the curiosity fading out of Asia overnight."

The euro was trading at \$1.18 dollars in early trade in New York after closing at 1.1885 in Asia.

For the moment, added Paul Farrell, an analyst with Chase Manhattan Bank, "the market is trying to get a sense of where it should be."

"It's not in the European interest to have a very strong euro right now," he said. "A strong euro is fine to get confidence in the new arrangement but a euro too strong would squash any export-led recovery they might have."

Strong currencies tend to drive up prices of exports, making them less competitive.

In the long run, Farrell added, the euro-dollar exchange rate "should be very similar to the European Currency Unit (ECU), except for the sterling component."

The ECU, which was replaced by the euro, closed out its career on Thursday at \$1.1721, sustained by gains in the British pound sterling.

Dealers said the initial response to the euro has been positive and is likely to remain so over the new few months.

But analysts stressed that such asset reallocation could only take the euro so far, as the new currency will soon have to reflect European economic fundamentals.

U.S. officials meanwhile hailed European monetary union and reiterated their conviction that a strong euro would not threaten the status of the dollar as the world's leading reserve currency.

"The United States has always supported an integrated Europe and anything that steps forward to that goal is supported by the U.S. government and anything that generates growth is good for the American economy," White House spokesman Joseph Lockhard told reporters.

Both Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin and his deputy, Lawrence Summers, stressed that the United States had nothing to fear from the euro — provided U.S. economic fundamentals remain sound.

"The euro just reemphasises... how important it is to focus on our own policies

and continue to make the United States a place where people want to invest their capital," Rubin said.

"I have no doubt that markets will fluctuate as they always do... That is not where our focus needs to be. Our focus needs to be on keeping our house in order and when our house is in order we will be in fine shape," he emphasised.

Interviewed by CNBC television, Summers said he was confident the European Central Bank would be committed to exchange rate stability regardless of any potential trade disputes with Washington.

"We have recognised for a long time that the dollar exchange rate cannot and should not be a tool of trade policy," Summers said.

"I think it is clear from statements of the European Central Bank that they recognise the importance of currency stability, and they know, as we often say, that no nation or for that matter region can devalue its way to prosperity," Summers said.

"Europeans are going to seek competitiveness in the same way as we do — by producing better products at lower cost. That's the way it ought to be done."

In the run-up to the launch of the euro, analysts in both Europe and the United States foresaw a situation in which a successful European currency could have a recognisable impact on the U.S. economy.

"The euro pretty quickly will start to rival the dollar as an international asset," Fred Bergsten, director of Washington's Institute for International Economics, told the Wall Street Journal.

Other analysts have raised the possibility that the euro, the first truly alternative vehicle to the dollar, might divert huge amounts of international funds that until now have tended to flow with little question into the U.S. economy.

They have said the development of more liquid European financial markets could drain off some of the \$11 trillion that were invested in U.S. equity markets in 1997.

HOROSCOPE

FORECAST FOR JANUARY, TUESDAY 5, 1999

By Linda C. Black, Tribune Media Services, Inc.

ARIES: (March 21 to April 19) There's more work than you could possibly do without getting organised. This isn't your forte, but luckily you do have one or two friends who are organised. They'll be a big help to you now. Get them to assist you in setting up a schedule. That's the only way you're going to get anything done.

TAURUS: (April 20 to May 20) Somebody you love needs something, and you could provide it. You'd get a chance to prove you're not only attractive, but also a good friend. And you might even make more friends in the process. People who see you taking care of others this way will be impressed. You do it naturally, but be on the lookout for the chance.

GEMINI: (May 21 to June 21) You'd rather think about distant projects, but something close to home needs your attention. You don't have to give up your dreams, but you might have to postpone them. If you move quickly, you could also provide something an older person needs. It'll make a big difference in his or her life. Be watching for a way to help.

CANCER: (June 22 to July 21) You're on the edge of a new discovery, and also on the edge of your seat. Its exciting to learn something new, and this could be profitable, too. There's a test involved. You'll have to prove you've mastered a skill that's required. You are up to the task, so relax. When the going gets tough, you'll remember what to do next.

LEO: (July 22 to August 21) Financial transactions take up most of your time and attention, or they should. A mistake could compound itself negatively. If you do things right, you'll make more interest, and you've already thought of interesting ways to spend it, speaking of interest. Its important for you to know what's going on, so do the homework.

VIRGO: (August 22 to September 22) You've got new levels of confidence, and you don't even know from where. Well, you don't have to know. Just trust that its OK for you to speak out and do what you do best. You've had the pressure before. Now you're getting the attention. You might as well take in a few of the rewards, too.

LIBRA: (September 23 to October 22) A person you respect is leaning on you to do things right. You want to play in the big leagues, so you're anxious to please. But there's a catch. The secret is to relax, not to work harder. If you can manage to do that, you'll find that everything gets handled effortlessly.

SCORPIO: (October 23 to November 21) You could make quite a bit of money today if you play your cards right. Get a team working with you. Tell them what you'd like to produce and how you want to do it. If you're decisive, they'll produce the results you asked for. If you're not used to working with a team, give it a try. You couldn't find a better day to practice.

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22 to December 21) You have an advantage today. You're smart, and you can learn the material if you concentrate. In fact, you might even get to advance in your career. The possibility is there, if you have the right answers when you're asked. Be ready. The quiz could come at any time. You have a good idea of what you'll need to know, so study up.

CAPRICORN: (December 22 to January 20) You're learning ask quickly as you can, but you're also teaching. The information comes through you, then gets routed to distant destinations. If you're not already doing something that fits this description, look around. The perfect job may be waiting for you. If you're not in it already, this is the perfect day to find it.

AQUARIUS: (January 21 to February 19) It'll be easier for you to keep track of your finances during this next phase. And you probably think you're a very detail-oriented person, and that's true. But you don't usually like details associated with finances. You wish somebody else would take care of that. Maybe that's possible. This is a good day to hire a Vingo bookkeeper.

PISCES: (February 20 to March 20) You know that person who's always giving you helpful advice, telling you how to live your life? Well, he or she is going to be on your case again today. You might as well listen politely. Take notes. You might discover that what this person's been trying to tell you all along is actually useful.

Birthstone of January: Garnet — Rose Quartz

Third Israel cellular company launches sales drive

TEL AVIV (R1 — Orange Partner Communications launched an aggressive marketing campaign in Israel on Thursday aiming to penetrate one of the most heavily saturated mobile telephone markets in the world.

"From Jan. 1, we are launching our marketing campaign and are sure we will get a huge number of subscribers. We are positive the Israeli public will find our product to be the best in quality and service," said Haim Romano, a vice president at Orange Partner.

The Orange-branded network in Israel is the country's third cellphone provider but the first to operate on a GSM (Global System for Mobile Communications) digital network allowing subscribers to use the phones at home and abroad.

"Our customers can now roam in 44 countries and the number of countries where it is possible is rising every day," Romano said.

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United States beaten in day of Hopman Cup shocks

PERTH (AFP) — Swede scored an upset win over the Lindsay Davenport-led United States and France's Sandrine Testud beat Spanish star Arantxa Sanchez Vicario in a day of shocks at the Hopman Cup on Monday.

Davenport and Jan-Michael Gambill, the second seeds in the mixed teams competition, suffered a shock defeat against the unseeded Swedish pair of Joacim Bjorkman and Asa Carlsson.

Bjorkman and Carlsson won the decisive mixed doubles 7-6 (7/2), 6-4 after the singles hooors had been shared.

Davenport, the World No. 1, blitzed Carlsson 6-2, 6-0 in 52 minutes in the women's singles but Bjorkman revived Swedish hopes when he beat Gambill 6-2, 6-4.

Bjorkman battled through with a troublesome right hamstring which could handicap him in the rest of the tournament.

"I even surprised myself that I played so well in the singles and doubles," Bjorkman said.

Davenport said the defeat was obviously a setback to U.S. hopes, but they were out of the competition.

"We have to be positive about it," she said. "The more we play together, the better we will get. The mixed doubles was a bit awkward today. I felt a little bit out of place."

Gambill said there were controversial calls for both teams in the doubles.

"One call in the first set tiebreaker was the worst I have ever seen in my short career. It is just one point, but it hard for you to get it out of your head," he said.

The United States must now win their next two matches against Switzerland's Ivo Heuberger and Martina Hingis on Thursday and the third-seeded reigning Slovak champions Karol Kucera and Karina Habsudova on Friday, to have a chance of reaching Saturday's final.

Testud romped to a 6-1, 6-3 win over Sanchez Vicario as unseeded France made a marvellous start to their cootest with title favorites Spain.

"Arantxa did not play her best today, but I am very happy to have won," said Testud.

"She is a very good player, and I just tried to keep concentrating."

It was Testud's third successive win against the Spaniard, following victories at Key Biscayne and San Diego in 1997.

Before that, the Spaniard had won three consecutive matches against Testud.

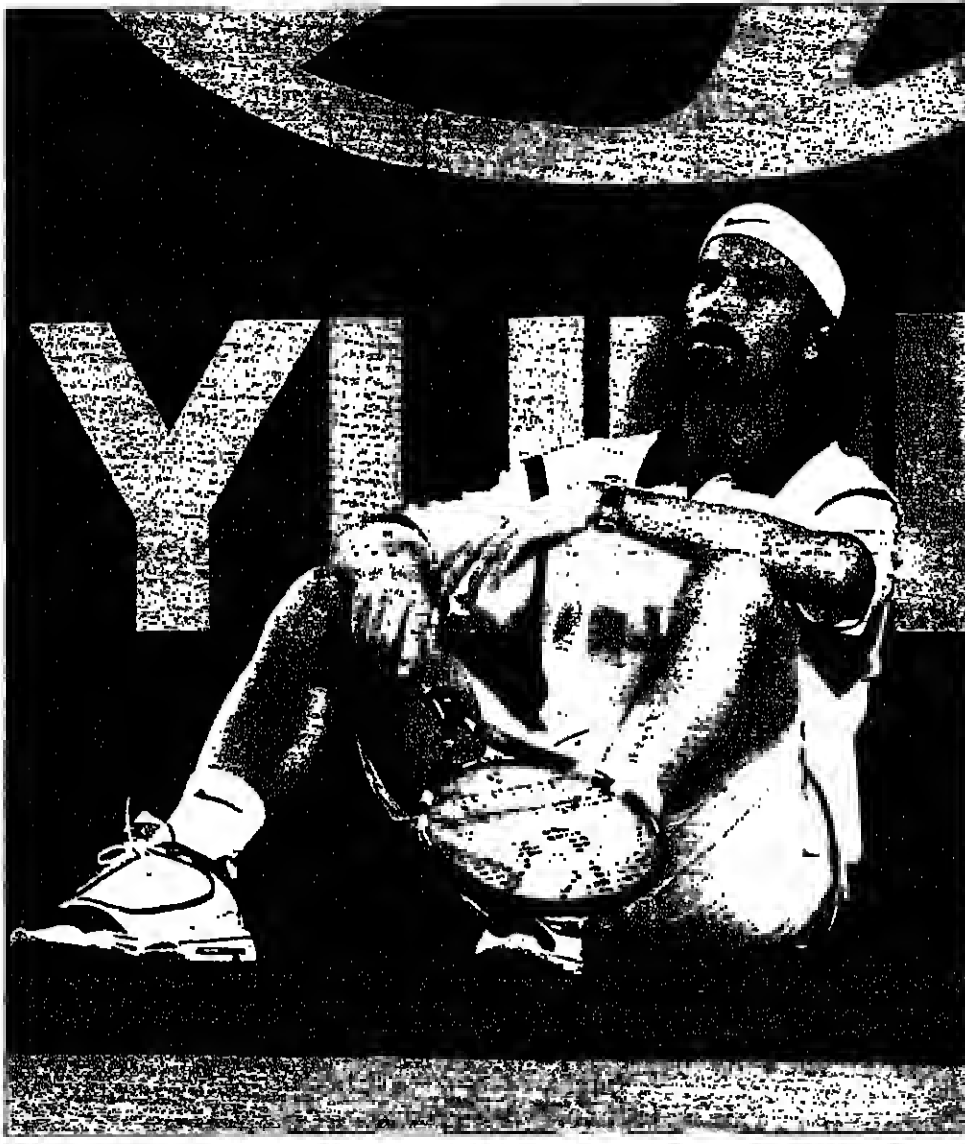
Testud, ranked 14th in the world — 10 places below her opponent — powerfully broke the Spaniard's service in the fourth and sixth games of the opening set.

Sanchez picked up her game in the second set, breaking Testud twice to take a 3-1 lead before the French player rallied to break back in the fifth, seventh and ninth games.

In the men's singles, France's Guillaume Raoux, ranked 53rd in the world, was playing Spain's World No. 5 Carlos Moya.



Sandrine Testud of France in action against opponent Arantxa Sanchez-Vicario of Spain during their match at the Hopman Cup in Perth, Australia. Testud defeated Sanchez-Vicario 6-1, 6-3 (AP photo)



Carlos Moya of Spain slumps against a court wall as he waits for French opponent Guillaume Raoux to replace a broken shoe lace during their match at the Hopman Cup in Perth, Australia, Monday. Moya defeated Raoux, winning the match 7-6, 2-6, 6-3 (AP photo)



Arantxa Sanchez-Vicario of Spain in action against opponent Sandrine Testud of France. Sanchez-Vicario lost the match to Testud 1-6, 3-6 (AP photo)

Kuerten wins in Australian hardcourts

ADELAIDE (AFP) — Brazilian Gustavo Kuerten defeated Frenchman Jerome Golmard 7-5, 6-1 in a quick opening round match at the Australian Open's hardcourt championships here Monday.

The third seed former French Open champion broke Golmard's serve to take the tight first set then streaked away, winning five straight games to take the second set with a sizzling display of aces.

Australian Michael Tehhutt made it through to the second round by beating Canadian Sebastian Lareau 6-3, 3-6, 6-1.

Scott Draper fought back to win through to the second round by beating American Justin Gimelstob 3-6, 7-6 (8/6), 6-3.

In his first tournament following a three-month lay-off since the U.S. Open, Draper struggled and showed signs of frustration, breaking a racket at one point.

But Draper said the right knee injury that troubled him throughout 1998 was no longer a problem and every match he could fit in now was a bonus ahead of the Australian Open.

Krajicek presses for details of Korda dope test

SYDNEY (AFP) — Former Wimbledon champion Richard Krajicek on Monday called on his fellow players to demand details of why Petr Korda escaped suspension for taking steroids.

Krajicek called on the International Tennis Federation to fully explain its lenient stance after the 30-year-old Australian Open champion from the Czech Republic failed a drug test at Wimbledon last year.

"Now is the time for the players to start asking questions about what really happened," said Krajicek, the world No. 10 who is practising for next week's Sydney international.

"It's a very sensitive issue to talk about but I don't understand it. If he tested positive

maybe he must have done it but maybe there must be another side to the story.

"Either you test positive or you don't and people should know exactly what went on."

"If the ITF really did make some kind of mistake with the test it's very hard for Petr because now he's got the name and it's going to be very tough to shake it."

Korda intends to defend his Australian Open title this month despite the announcement of the positive test for the banned steroid Nandrolone.

Most major sports ban first-time steroid offenders for two years. The ITF, which runs the four grand slams, has provision for a maximum one-year suspension.

But the ITF merely took away Korda's Wimbledon

prizemoney and 199 computer ranking points at a meeting on December 22.

Korda has said he will now shelve his retirement plans because of the scandal. He is defending his Qatar Open title in Doha this week.

"I'll prove myself as a player here at Doha. I am determined to climb back up the world rankings. I intend to quit in around two years," he said last week.

"I have been proved innocent by the ITF and the decision will be announced shortly."

The ITF has also been criticised for keeping Korda's positive test quiet until the punishment was decided by its independent appeal committee last month.

Sugiyama wins tense opener to Australian women's hardcourts

HOPE ISLAND, Australia (AFP) — Defending champion Ai Sugiyama of Japan won a tense three-set match against American Corina Morariu to reach the second round of the Australian women's hardcourt championships here Monday.

The fourth seed and World No. 18, who was runner-up in 1997 and winner last year, beat Morariu 6-2, 6-7 (6/8), 6-3.

She now plays Sarah Pitkowski of France who made fewer mistakes to beat erratic Australian Alicia Molik 6-3, 6-2.

Romania's Ruxandra Dragomir won her first match beating Ukrainian Elena Tatarukova 6-1, 6-3. Wang Shi-ting of Taiwan overcame Sylvia Plischke of Austria 6-4, 7-6 (7/2) and

now plays second seed Pany Schnyder of Switzerland in the next round of the \$108,000 event.

Top seed Mary Pierce of France took her day off to herald the women's game.

"I love watching men's tennis but nowadays I think women's tennis is much more exciting because there's so much more depth," she said.

"There are no easy first rounds anymore. It keeps you on your toes and I think it's more exciting for the public."

Ranked seven in the world, the Frenchwoman won four titles in 1998 and reached the quarter-finals in the Australian Open which she won in 1995 for her only grand slam title.

A good year on and off the court, including her engagement to U.S. Major League baseballer Roberto Alomar, has Pierce looking forward to 1999.

"I had good year in all senses and I think I'm maturing as a person and a player," Pierce said.

Important to Pierce is a good showing in the Australian Open in Melbourne.

"From my own standpoint it's always been an important tournament for me," Pierce said.

"All grand slams are important and when I won in 95 that was the most memorable moment of my career and I feel very comfortable playing there."

Young and 49ers snap Packer jinx in spectacular style

SAN FRANCISCO (AFP) — Steve Young and the San Francisco 49ers ended their San Francisco frustration against Green Bay in amazing fashion here Sunday with receiver Terrell Owens going from goat to hero.

Owens caught a 25-yard touchdown pass from Young with three seconds remaining to give the 49ers a 30-27 first-round National Football League playoff victory over the Packers.

Second-year receiver Owens found redemption in the end zone, clinging to the ball after being hit by two defenders after dropping four passes and losing a fumble earlier in the game.

"I started out with a fumble and dropping a few passes. It was a tough day," Owens said. "Everybody stayed with me. They told me to shake it off. I knew somebody was going to have to make a big play."

Steve Young gave me a chance and the Lord gave it to me."

Young was winless in eight career games against Green Bay, which had knocked the 49ers out of the playoffs the past three seasons and won five in a row over San Francisco.

The 49ers advanced to an NFL quarter-final game Saturday at Atlanta. That winner will face the survivor of next Sunday's game between Arizona and Minnesota for a berth in the Super Bowl January 31 at Miami.

On the winning drive, Young riddled the same Packers defence that

sacked him a career-high nine times on November 1 in a 36-22 loss. Young completed 7 of 9 passes for 76 yards in 1:53, then jumped for joy.

Owens, mobbed by his teammates, was in tears on the sidelines.

"When he made that catch, he almost lost (control of his emotions)," 49ers coach Steve Mariucci said. "He was frustrated because he dropped a couple passes. I told him to have a short memory, forget it."

Also in tears was Green Bay defender Reggie White, who walked off the field for the final time into retirement. "Sorry we weren't able to do it for you," White told Packers fans.

A season marred by officiating errors continued when television replay showed 49er receiver Jerry Rice fumbled on a play when referees ruled him down, sustaining San Francisco's drive for the winning points.

The Packers moved ahead 27-23 with 1:56 to play when Brett Favre completed a 15-yard touchdown pass to Antonio Freeman.

Favre hurled a 47-yard completion to rookie Corey Bradford and Dorsey Levens followed with a 15-yard, third-down run to the 49ers' 15-yard line to spark Green Bay's 89-yard march.

Wade Richey's third field goal of the game, a 40-yard kick, had given San Francisco a 23-20 lead with 6:13 to play.

Richey's career-longest 48-yard

field goal had given the 49ers a 17-12 lead into the third quarter but Ryan Longwell pulled the Packers even with 11:50 to go with a 37-yard field goal.

Young had equalised at 17-17 in San Francisco six minutes into the second half on his second touchdown pass of the game to Greg Clark, this one an 8-yard effort.

Dorsey Levens scored on a two-yard run with 31 seconds remaining in the second quarter to give Green Bay a 17-10 half-time lead.

The Packers' first touchdown came on Brett Favre's two-yard toss to Antonio Freeman on the first play of the second quarter, giving Green Bay a 10-7 lead before Richey's 34-yard field goal equalised for the 49ers.

San Francisco had taken a 7-3 lead on Clark's one-yard touchdown catch from Young after Green Bay scored first on Longwell's 23-yard field goal.

The 49ers had signed retired defensive end Charles Haley to boost their pass rush. Haley, 34, is the only player in NFL history to play on five Super Bowl championships. He retired two years ago with back pain.

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				HEAT Show: 10:00 Adel Imam .. in			
				RISALA ILAL WALI Shows: 6:15, 8:30, 10:30			

LOCAL SPORTS SCENE

Football association
to distribute JD100,000

AMMAN — The Jordan Football Association (JFA) is expected to distribute JD100,000 to the Premier League's clubs within the coming few weeks. The JFA will also soon finalise a deal for next season with the consortium in charge of marketing the league. The two sides faced a controversial situation when the federation cancelled the 1998 league with five weeks remaining following a controversial call by the referee which led to a boycott by the clubs.

Maintenance to start
at Amman stadium

AMMAN — The Amman International Stadium is expected to close down in order to get it ready for the Aug. 15-31, 1999 Pan-Arab Games. Al Hussein Youth City Director Abdul Ghani Tabalat said the Games committee in charge of construction will soon start maintenance work on the city's facilities. He added that the procedures include replacing the stadium's lawn, maintaining the drainage system, upgrading audio-visual transmission and constructing a car park with a capacity for 1800 vehicles.

Karate teams to have joint
camp with Greeks

AMMAN — The Jordan Karate Federation has decided to host the Greek men's and women's teams in February. They are expected to hold a joint training camp and friendly matches with Jordan's national teams.

Committee to evaluate Asian
Games results

AMMAN — Ministry of Culture and Youth Secretary-General Thouqan Obeidat Tuesday heads the first meeting of a committee in charge of re-evaluating Jordan's participation in the Asian Games, which were held in Bangkok Dec. 6-20. The committee is expected to submit its recommendations to Minister of Culture and Youth Talal Sata'an Al Hassan to review them with the Jordanian Olympic Committee.



German driver Jutta Kleinschmidt and co-driver Tina Thörner from Sweden drive their Mitsubishi Pajero during the third stage of the Granada-Dakar rally between Agadir and Tan-Tan, Morocco. The team leads the race in their category (AP photo)

SPORTS IN BRIEF

Suker may join Panathinaikos

MADRID (AFP) — Croatian World Cup star Davor Suker — unsent at Real Madrid — could be on his way to Greek club Panathinaikos, according to Spanish media reports on Monday. Panathinaikos have offered \$6.3 million for Suker, who was the leading scorer at the 1998 World Cup finals in France, the sports newspaper Marca reported.

Vierkluu wants to quit Tenerife

THE HAGUE (AFP) — Dutch international defender Ferdy Vierkluu said Monday that he wants to quit Spanish first division strugglers Tenerife after a financial row that has lasted several months. "We are already actively seeking another club for Ferdy," the player's agent, Henk van Ginkel, said. Vierkluu returned to Holland at the weekend after failing to reach agreement with Tenerife. The 25-year-old defender has played eight internationals for Holland and joined Tenerife in 1997 from Vitesse Arnhem.

British close on Argentine crew in yacht race

MELBOURNE (AFP) — British sailors Richard Elphinstone and Thomas Makey scored their second win of the International Cadet World Yachting Championships here Monday. Elphinstone and Makey led all the way in the light 10-knot south-easterly breeze to beat four of the 10 race series in the only class raced Monday. The British crew won comfortably from Argentinians Juan Lupo and Avelan Gabin and another British crew of San Carter and Rich Harding. With 1st, 11th, 5th and 1st placings, Elphinstone and Makey totalled 18 points, four behind leaders Gonzalo Pollitzer and Martin Manrique of Argentina who finished 10th on Monday after their 2-1-1 start to the championships.

World championship sailors set course for Olympics

MELBOURNE (AFP) — Olympic qualifying places will be the goal for 2,000 sailors from 60 countries competing in 16 classes at the world yachting championships starting here Monday. Yachtsmen are competing in seven Olympic classes of Soling, 49ers, Finn, Laser, Europe women, 470 men and 470 women. The Finn division represents one of the toughest competitions in the championships with the Atlanta gold medalist Poland's Mateusz Kusznierewicz and Belgium's silver medalist Sebastian Godefroid both racing. Kusznierewicz won the Australian championships which finished here last week. In the women's 470 class Ukrainian pair Ruslana Taran and Elena Pakholchik are chasing their third world championship in as many years. In the 90-woman Europe fleet, Dutchwoman Carolijn (Carolijn) Brouwer, the 1998 world champion, has been in terrific form winning the Sydney International Regatta last month.

Participating countries, marketing
agreements to be finalised this week
Iraqi confirmation brings number of competing countries to 12

By Aileen Bannayan

AMMAN — Officials hope the number of countries taking part in next summer's Pan-Arab Games as well as agreements regarding marketing and television coverage rights will be finalised within the coming week.

Jordan Olympic Committee (JOC) Vice-President Mouaffaq Al Fawwaz said Dec. 31 was earlier set as the final date for confirming participation but many countries had not yet done so.

Iraq and Qatar Monday confirmed participation bringing the number of countries taking part to 12.

Iraq notified the organising committee that a 400-strong delegation would take part in 24 sports.

Fawwaz said the organising committee was still awaiting word from the countries to finalise the list of events in the two-week tournament.

"We will know that within the coming week. It is of utmost importance to have the final number of teams and events for the success of all organisational aspects," Fawwaz Monday told the Jordan Times.

He said that the preliminary number of 27 events was very high and expected it to drop. The Beirut Games had 19 countries taking part in 20 sports events.

"Any event with less than five countries taking part will be cancelled. That will also make it easier for TV coverage and other aspects in the daunting task of organising such a

mega event," Fawwaz added.

Insiders said the late confirmation by some countries is probably affected by varied reasons: athletes from North African countries might have reservations about taking part in the Games which coincides with other international events such as the African Tournament and the World Athletics Championships. Officials expected the strain between Gulf countries and Iraq to also affect the Games.

The JOC official said the Saudi firm, RAF, was most likely to win the marketing rights with \$1.5 million paid to Jordan in addition to 70 per cent of any additional income.

Television coverage rights had also not been finalised, with recent reports estimating that JTV needed JD6 million to be able to acquire equipment and manpower to cover the event properly.

Fawwaz noted that the construction of facilities was going ahead as planned with 25 sport facilities, including three sport cities, having been finalised to host the Games which will include 27 events for men and 19 for women.

As for the technical aspect of preparing Jordan's teams Fawwaz noted that only a few federations were adopting a carefully thought out strategy and were preparing their teams in a serious manner.

"Most federations, apart from handball, volleyball, and taekwondo have not shown a serious attitude in deal-

ing with the challenge. We should move fast to remedy this situation," Fawwaz noted.

He said that a committee charged with assessing Jordan's recent participation in the 13th Asian Games would meet Tuesday and discuss recent results to chart out a new plan for the federations.

Jordan only managed five medals, four by taekwondo, in the event. Most athletes failed to even match their own record set in the country.

Fawwaz warned of a wide gap between sports federations and athletes which led to the dismal Jordanian showing at the Asian Games.

With many officials and insiders calling for an immediate change in the sports federations which should have taken place in September, the ministry has so far not taken that step. Informed sources also suggest that change would affect only four out of over 20 federations, and surprisingly exclude federations whose athletes produced below par results.

After a recent visit to Amman, the Arab Ministerial Committee examining Jordan's preparations for the Games underlined their support for the Amman Games, saying that they would recommend to the Arab League that Jordan receives additional funding and assistance.

Since the Arab Sports Federation (ASF) advanced the date of the upcoming Games to 1999 instead of 2001, the Council of Arab Sports

Ministers increased aid to the Kingdom to enable it to prepare infrastructure and update sports facilities.

Aid from the Arab League has been raised to \$200,000 while the Council of Arab Ministers will grant \$1 million instead of \$700,000.

Additional sponsorship for Jordan's bid will be garnered through lowering the 50 per cent ASF margin of profit on promotion and television coverage.

The Jordanian government has earmarked JD18 million for the event including the construction of a multipurpose indoor stadium with a capacity for 7,000 spectators; an Olympic-size swimming pool; a track and field stadium, in addition to acquiring and upgrading facilities with electronic timing machines and other needs.

Lebanon, which hosted the 8th Pan-Arab Games last summer, received \$28 million from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait to help in construction of sport facilities destroyed during the civil war.

The Amman Games will be followed by the first Arab Paralympics.

The Pan-Arab Games have only been held eight times: Alexandria in 1953, Beirut 1957, Casablanca 1961, Cairo 1965, Damascus 1976, Morocco 1985, Damascus 1992 and Beirut 1997.

Seeds
advance in
Auckland

AUCKLAND (AFP) — Austria's Barbara Schett swept past struggling German Elena Wagner 6-1, 6-0 to get past the first round for the first time in four appearances at the Auckland WTA tournament here Monday.

Second seed Silvia Farina of Italy, ranked 19th in the world, also enjoyed a useful workout against Germany's Andrea Glass 6-4, 7-5 to set up a second-round match against American Meghann Shaughnessy.

Shaughnessy beat Italy's Laura Golarsa 6-1, 6-4. Eighth-seed Maria Alejandra Vento of Venezuela suffered an early scare when she lost the first set to Germany's Marlene Weingartner.

Asian soccer chief blasts two-year World Cup plan

FIFA vice-president sees problems

LONDON (AFP) — FIFA vice-president David Will on Monday admitted that changing the World Cup to every two years would create "enormous problems," but insisted he would keep an open mind about the plan.

The proposal has been put forward by FIFA president Sepp Blatter, and Will, the British Football Associations' representative on the world governing body, concedes the first he heard of the idea was in the media.

The Scot stressed he shared Blatter's desire to maintain international soccer's place in the spotlight and would be more than willing to discuss the matter at executive level.

But he intimated that, in his view, the tournament might be devalued by abandoning its present four-year cycle — echoing widespread fears that more might produce less.

Will said: "This has not as yet been discussed at executive meetings and members like myself are hearing it now for the first time, but we would not reject any suggestion out of hand."

"When an idea is proposed by the president of FIFA then it deserves a fair hearing as to its potential merits, but I have to say I can foresee enormous problems."

"There would be logistical concerns because of the sheer level of organisation required to prepare for and produce a successful World Cup tournament."

"There is also the matter of the confederations having their own competitions, notably the likes of the European Championships and the African Nations Cup."

But Will added he recognised Blatter's motive was to retain the status of the international game ahead of the burgeoning club tournaments spearheaded through the European Champions' League.

He explained: "For me the most important part of what Sepp Blatter said was his anxiety to preserve the national teams and that is a desire to be shared by the rest of us and gives us all anxiety."

"But I would say being every four years does without doubt give the World Cup its special quality and there would be the danger of a biennial event losing that."

frequently. With Japan and Korea co-hosting the 2002 World Cup finals, Velappan said this would be an experiment to assess the feasibility of the FIFA proposal.

"If this proves to be satisfactory, it is possible in the future for the World Cup to be hosted by more than one country. If this works out, then it may be feasible to hold the event every two years," he added.

South Korean football officials cast doubt on Blatter's proposal however. "We are not totally opposed to his idea. But European teams may have difficulties because of their tight game schedule," said Na Sam-Hyon, a senior Korea Football Association

(KFA) official.

Other KFA officials played down the report as Blatter's personal views.

The proposal was also greeted with scepticism in Japan.

"Personally speaking, it may be all but impossible in view of the crowded schedule of football events, including those at home," said Hiroshi Onozawa, public relations chief of the Japan Football Association.

Top JFA and Japanese World Cup organising committee officials were not available for comment. But the spokesman said he

believed Blatter's remarks were meant to be a message for Europe.

Blatter was quoted as saying: "I want World Cups every two years. National teams would thereby regain the status they deserve."

Blatter favours continental championships held in odd years with the leading sides

on each continent advancing to a World Cup to be held the following year, it said.

Blatter, who was elected FIFA president last June, said his proposals were a reaction to European media tycoons, including Italian Silvio Berlusconi, who are pressing for a super league of top European clubs.

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